

WOMAN IN THE NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE : A STUDY



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Certificate

*This is to certify that the dissertation entitled *Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande : A Study* is the bonafide work done by S. Prasanna Sree during the period of study under my supervision and that the dissertation has not previously formed the basis of the award to the candidate of any degree, diploma or associateship or fellowship or other similar title.*

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SHASHI DESHPANDE



A woman should not be oppressed just because she is a woman. She has every right to live her life, to develop into a full-blown individual, to take her own decisions, to be independent and to take charge of her own destiny.

-Shashi Deshpande

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Preface

Shashi Deshpande is undoubtedly the most significant of the contemporary Indian women novelists in English but she has not received the critical attention she deserves. Though a few articles in some journals and books are being published and a collection of critical essays on her is edited and published, there is no full-length study of *Shashi Deshpande*'s fiction barring one by *Sarabjit Sandhu* on her early novels.

In this thesis, an attempt is, therefore, made to study *Shashi Deshpande*'s women protagonists, as portrayed by her in her novels, with a view to understand and appreciate their trials and tribulations under the impact of the conflicting influences of tradition and modernity and to critically analyse their responses to the emerging situations in life so as to fit themselves in the contemporary society. Without probing deeply into the feminist aspects, this exercise, as can be expected, gives an insight into the novelist's conviction of what would serve as the ideal panacea for the different kinds of challenges her characters have had to contend with, in the given situations. *Come up and Be Dead* and *If I Die Today*, two detective serials of *Shashi Deshpande* which have been expanded and published as novels are not included for study as the very nature of their themes seems to at variance with the topic chosen for this research.

Women, who constitute a half of the world's population, are paradoxically not treated on a par with men in all spheres of human activity. They are confined to their homes, oppressed, suppressed and marginalised in the matter of sharing the available opportunities for fulfilment

of their lives. Even in the modern, changed ambience, her position is still unenviable as she stands on the threshold of social change. Intensely aware of her exploitation - socially, economically and politically - by man, she attempts to voice her bitter feelings of protest, but in doing so, she has to reckon with the prospect of social ostracism for questioning the sanctity of time-honoured and time-tested traditions.

Possessing a rare insight into the entire panorama of women's plight in the present day custom-bound Indian society, women writers reflect in their novels the subtle factors and the besetting influences contributing to the none-to-happy position of womanhood in the emerging society. They analyse the reforming phenomenon of the Indian woman - from the submissive and subservient status to the liberated and creative phase-intent on shaping her own future. One such writer of eminence is Shashi Deshpande whose women protagonists, all drawn from the middle class, are sensitive, intelligent, educated and career - oriented. She endeavours to establish woman as an individual who breaks loose from the traditional constraints and redefines her identity in tune with the changed social ambience of the modern times. Five of her major novels, *Roots and Shadows* to *A Matter of Time* in the chronological order, are chosen for this critical study.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is introductory in nature. The subsequent five chapters deal with the five women protagonists - Indu, Saru, Jaya, Urmila and Sumi-who, finding themselves trapped in the roles assigned to them by the society, attempt to assert their individuality. Sensitive to the changing times and situations, they revolt against the traditions in their search for freedom. They succeed in achieving self-identity and independence and choose their partners in life

to live with in pursuance of their felt need to lead a family life. They establish the fact that they can be true to their convictions irrespective of what role they play in the family - a daughter, a wife, a mother and also a career woman. Standing at the cross-roads of tradition they do seek a change, but within the cultural norms so as to enable themselves to live with dignity and self-respect.

In the introductory chapter, an attempt has been made to trace the status of women in the Indian society down the ages in order to know to what extent social justice was rendered to the women folk from time to time. An attempt has also been made in this chapter to extensively survey the works of other women writers to trace the commonness and divergence in their themes and perspectives and thus bring into sharp relief Shashi Deshpande's own views in relation to those of her fellow writers. Shashi Deshpande's thematic concerns in her novels have also been discussed.

The second chapter is designed to show how Indu, the protagonist in *Roots and Shadows*, emerges successfully as a woman of determination, not yielding to the dictates of the patriarchal society. She exemplifies a woman in the transitional period who is torn between age-old traditions and individual views. It records how she defies the worn-out traditions, pushes aside all her fears about her imagined inadequacies and asserts herself as an individual.

The third chapter studies how Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, who seeks freedom without impinging on her obligations and responsibilities and achieves harmony in life. It shows how she undergoes a trauma when her professional success has cast a shadow on her married life

and how boldly she stands up to the situation and audaciously accepts the challenge of her own protege.

The fourth chapter traces how *Jaya* of *That Long Silence* gradually emerges as a confident individual fully in control of herself and refuses to be led by nose. A stereotyped house wife initially nervous and needing male help and support all the time, she understands that she also has contributed to her victimisation and that she has to fight her own battle and work out her own strategy. It unravels how with this new confidence *Jaya* becomes emancipated without rejecting outright the cultural and social background.

In the fifth chapter, *Urmila* of *The Binding Vine* is depicted as an advanced version over the earlier women protagonists in Shashi Deshpande's novels in as much as she goes a step further and helps the poor and the downtrodden. She fights for another woman's cause while the others have fought their own battles. It shows how she exhibits her interest and capacity to purge the society of its evils.

The sixth chapter unravels how *Sumi*, a deserted wife, is dauntless in her adversity-how she evolves herself from utter desolation and bitterness linked up with invisible chains of patriarchal pressure and other family responsibilities. It records how with courage, dignity, responsibility and independent spirit, even after desertion by her husband, she has reached a stage of self sufficiency and self-fulfilment.

The concluding chapter offers a summing - up of the thesis, highlighting the escalating positivism in the succession of the women protagonists in the novels of Shashi Deshpande.

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S. Prasanna Oree

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

RS	ROOTS AND SHADOWS
TDHNT	THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS
TLS	THAT LONG SILENCE
TBV	THE BINDING VINE
MOT	A MATTER OF TIME
TSC	THE SKY CHANGES
ITH	INSIDE THE HAVELI

Chapter - 1

Introduction

We talk of revolution - political and economic and yet the greatest revolution in a country is one that effects improvement in the status and living conditions of its women.

- Jawaharlal Nehru

Women who constitute half of the world's population are paradoxically not treated on par with men in all spheres of human activity. They are oppressed, suppressed and marginalised in the matter of sharing the available opportunities for fulfilment of their lives, despite the fact that every woman slaves for the development of her family, her husband and children. This disturbing picture of woman is not something new or unique only to India. This is the predicament of women all over the world Ernestine observes :

Humanity recognizes no sex; mind recognizes no sex; Life and death, pleasure and pain, happiness and misery recognize no sex. Like man, woman comes involuntarily into existence; like him, she possesses physical and mental and moral powers... like him she has to pay the penalty for disobeying nature's laws, and far greater penalties she has to suffer from ignorance... like men she also enjoys or suffers with her country. Yet she is not recognized as his equal!.(Ernestine: 1)

In a male dominated society, woman is supposed to be an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent home-maker with multifarious roles in the family. As wife and mother, service, sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance are her required attributes. Excessive endurance and series of adjustments she makes in her life faithfully and obediently are her admired qualities. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement is her normal way of life. In the words of Mary Ann Ferguson, *...in every age woman has been seen primarily as mother, wife, mistress, and as sex object- their roles in relationship to men!* (Ferguson : 4-5) As a woman grows, she is inculcated with the ideas of self-abnegation, of pride in patience, of the need to accept a lower status through the mythical modes of Sita, Savithri and Gandhari. Following these models, she is taught to be shy, gentle and dignified as a person pure and faithful as a wife and selfless, loving and thoughtful as a mother.

The greatest and noblest tribute to motherhood has come from Adi Sankaracharya, in his famous 'sloka', beginning with *Aastaam taavadiyam* and ending with *tasyai Jananyai namah* - Salutations to that motherhood. All civilizations and cultures have created over the centuries characteristic images of woman in the areas of their sway. The images of woman in Indian civilization, culture and mythology are as diverse as the geographical, historical and other influences that have shaped them. The classical Hindu wife has to conform to the concept embodied in the famous 'sloka', *Grihini, Sachivah, Sakhi, Mithah Priya - Shishyalalite Kala Vidhu* meaning that as a wife, woman has many roles to play. She must not only be a wife but also a counsellor, the playmate to the partner:

*Karyeshu Mantri, Karaneshu Daasi
Rupecha Lakshmi, kshamayaa dharitri
Bhojyeshu Mata, Shayentu Rambha
Shat karma Yukta, Kula Dharma Patni. (Acharya : 351)*

(A woman should serve her husband as minister while counselling, by her looks she should be as Goddess Lakshmi, like the earth in forbearance, as a Mother while feeding and in bed, she must be like the celestial beauty).

A dichotomous perception of woman exists in the epics. She is deified as Goddess and Divine Mother and epitome of patience, suffering and forbearance while, on the other hand, a woman is also viewed as the precursor of evil, epitome of lust. Alladi Uma observes :

... The Hindu mind has created schismatic Goddesses; on the one hand Durga is difficult to know or to approach; on the other, as Mother of the Universe, she epitomises tender love... Kali, often thought of as Evil, Death, Destroyer, Devourer, is also creator... (Uma:4)

For centuries, the Hindu woman idealised the mythic models from the Ramayana and other Puranas. Indian women were asked to get inspired by the archetype women like Sita, the silent sufferer. Often the Indian woman is passive and accepts the given role in shaping her destiny. At every stage of her life, she is dependent for her status and survival upon man - her father, her husband, her sons. The role of woman has been full of contradictions so far as

Indian customs and traditions are concerned. However, this gloomy picture did not exist in the pre-historic period when there was no gender-bias and women were not even considered as separate entities. Women had a pride of place in the Vedic period, when they were deified and glorified.

During the Vedic period (2500 BC - 1500 BC) according to historians like Altekar (1962), Indira (1955) and Kapadia (1958), women were treated with dignity and respect in all matters - religious, social, political and economical. Basically, in the Vedic society, two types of women were visualized- *Brahmavadhini* and *Sadyovadhu*. *Brahmavadhini* was the ascetic type who carried on the quest of truth, knowledge and spiritual pursuits. Upanayana or initiation to learning was accepted as a routine event. Women's education was encouraged and a woman meant for learning was addressed as 'Yagnopavatini'. Wives of great rishis were encouraged to take part in intellectual discussions. Women were permitted to attend important assemblies, state functions, religious duties and rituals and take up profession as priests. 'Sabotimini' Sabhadharmini or co'religionists' as these women were called, and both man and wife together offered their worship testifying the fact that they were equals in status. Women distinguished themselves in arts, science and in political events. They were honoured and termed as 'Grihalakshmi'. In Dutt's **History of civilisation in Ancient India**, the Vedic woman was the highest symbol of Hindu womanhood. Dutt further argues that

"Women were honoured in ancient India, more perhaps than among any other ancient nation on the face of the Globe. They were considered "the

intellectual companions of their husbands... affectionate helpers in the journey of life, and ... inseparable partners in their religious duties.
(Ramesh : 67)

Throughout the Vedic period, woman was given a status equal to that of man. Her participation was essential in sacrificial rites like Yagas and she was on an equal footing with man in upholding dharma. She could fight wars, go to the battle field like Kaikayee, take part in philosophic discussions like Gargi and Maitreyi or even remain unmarried if she so desired. "So great an influence", Wrote Friedrich Max Muller (1823 - 1900), the Anglo-German scholar,

"has the vedic age... upon all succeeding periods of Indian History... so deeply have the religious and moral ideas of that primitive era taken root in the mind of the Indian nation, so minutely has almost every private and public act of Indian life been regulated by old traditional precepts, that it is impossible to find the right point of view for judging Indian religion, morals and literature without a knowledge of the literary remains of the Vedic age.
(Muller: 135).

Lopamudra, Bhirwara, Gargi, Ghosha, Godha, Vishwavara, Apala, Maitreyi, Arundhati etc. were learned women while scholars like Sulabha Maithreye, Vachaknavi, Leelavathi were great Mathematicians. Khaana was a well known astronomer. During this period, women were permitted to learn

grammar and fine arts like dance, painting and vocational courses like spinning, thread making, lace-making and weaving. The Mahanirvana Tantra says "A girl also should be brought up and educated with great effort and care" (8.47). Marriageable age was between 14 and 17 years. Educated girls had the option of choosing their life partners through 'Swayamvara' which was a fair and commonly accepted way of selecting their grooms among kshatriya communities. 'Sati' was not known. There was, however, no legal awareness among women.

A.S.Altekar claims that the status of women is one of the best gauges of the "*spirit of a civilisation, its excellencies and its limitations*" (Altekar : 9). He states that the Vedic age was one in which women enjoyed singular freedom. More than 20 Brahmavadhis are said to have composed hymns of the Rigveda, according to Saravanukramanika. Shakuntala Rao, commenting on the status of women in the Vedic age, says that :

Woman was regarded with due respect in every sphere of life, and she was not subject to any of the miraculous laws of an unsympathetic society.
(Shakuntala : 37)

During the subsequent periods, there has been a gradual decline in the status of woman. During the Atharvaveda period, people were seen displaying a strong preference for boys. The birth of a son was welcomed. The common belief was that a son would save his father from the hell called "Punnama

narakam". There was not a single word for the daughter. A wife was asked to be the mother of sons and only sons. As a woman's destiny depended on her sons, it was natural for her to perform austerity and penances for begetting them. Further, in *Aitareya Brahmana*, the position of a girl had worsened still. It says "A wife is a comrade; a daughter, a misery; and a son, a light in the highest heaven". The daughter was described as a 'trust' of the father later to become the 'property' of the husband.

The status and position of women degraded and deteriorated with the passage of time. The theory of perpetual tutelage of women formulated by Manusmriti, the earliest and most authoritative work representing the Hindu life and culture, was also known as "**Manava Dharmashastra**". According to scholars Manusmriti was the earliest that dealt with social philosophy, perpetuating a dependent role for woman.

... *Pitā rakshati kaumare, bharttarakshati yauvāne,
rakshanti sthavire putra
Na stri swatantryamarhati*" (*Manu, 9/3*).

("Day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males of their families... Her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth and her son protects her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence").

He did not advocate equality of status between men and women. " His ideal was that of oneness of the two and not of equality with each other" (*Manusmriti IV, 1 & 4*) But, Manu was not a woman hater, for he had

also said, "*where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards*". Manu regarded woman as by nature more emotional and less rational than man. He said; "*When creating them, God allotted to women a love of their bed, of their seat and of ornaments, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct*" (*Manusmriti IX, 18*). The double standard of morality set up by Manu worsened the position of women, and this further went down in the later years due to lack of education and introduction of child marriage during the Mughal period. Series of invasions by foreigners jeopardized the security of women's life. Women were carried away as "commodities" by the invaders. Jauhar, Sati, Purdah came into being, further impinging on the social liberties of women.

When India witnessed the advent of Buddhism, there was equal status between man and woman in society, for it allowed women to be educated, to travel as missionaries, and even to remain unmarried. Buddha's compassion and respect for human beings served to raise the position of women. Marriage was no more a compulsive sacrament, but a secular, social, and economic contract which duly recognised the equality of the sexes and did not fetter women. Child marriage, bride price, Sati, etc. were discarded. As Buddhism believed in the individual independence and right to ultimate liberation, women became truly unshackled. Closely followed by it was Jainism. The monastic life of the Jains offered women the best opportunities for intellectual and aesthetic cultivation. Later, during the spread of Sikhism, men were exhorted to hold women in high esteem and to cherish them. There were a

number of intellectuals who championed the cause of "sex equality" like Varahamitra, the famous astronomer, along with Devanbhattacharya and Medhatithi. They emphatically condemned the inhuman customs inhibiting the women on the ground that there was no shastric support for doing so.

Entry of Islam into India made the status of women go further down. The Purdah system ordained by Islam prevented women from participating in public affairs or recreational pursuits. Their lot was confined to toiling for the family and for providing pleasure and relaxation to men. This double standard targeting women was in accordance with the then prevailing social dispensation. A feeling of insecurity pervaded and women were secluded as a measure to safeguard themselves. They were expected to be devoted and submissive, docile and tolerant. Even so, they were not spared from torture, victimisation and exploitation in every conceivable way.

James Mill sharply points out the predicament of Indian woman when he says:

Nothing can exceed the habitual contempt which Hindus entertain for their women. Hardly are they ever mentioned in their laws or other books, but as wretches of the most base and vicious inclinations. On whose nature no virtuous or useful qualities can be engrafted. (James Mill : 281)

Aurobindo grieves at the degraded position of the Indian women when he comments thus :

In India... the woman had at first a free and more dignified position than in Greece and Rome, but the slave was soon replaced by the proletariat, called in India the Shudra, and the increasing tendency to deny the highest benefits of the common life and culture to the Shudra and the woman brought down Indian society to the level of the Western conquerors. (Aurobindo : 103-104)

During this period, the English missionaries who were socially liberal, had applied themselves to social reforms. They were active in putting a stop to social evils like Sati, infanticide, forced labour and slavery. At the dawn of the British rule, women were in a sorry state. The Vedic liberties enjoyed by them were long forgotten. It was also at this time that Raja Ram Mohan Roy raised his voice against social evils like Sati, Purdah etc. Indira Kulashretha observes : "After centuries of social stagnation, the Indian woman was now encouraged to come back to the mainstream of social life and resume her rightful place". (Indira : 5) The objective for women seemed to take a new leap forward by defining it as complete equality with men in all spheres, setting a new tone to the whole movement.

The birth of two movements during the colonial rule in India paved the way to create awareness of the need for improvement in women's condition, and the idea to impart education to women was revived. The Social Reform Movement and the Nationalist Movement had deep impact on the status of women. Reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy not only made zealous efforts to bring about the legal abolition of certain loathsome customs but also advocated the need for widow remarriage and opened up opportunities of

higher education for women. Consequently, women's education received an impetus in the 19th Century. Uma Alladi says, "... *it was designed to develop in a woman those qualities that were seen as essential to making her a good housewife - reticence in speech, subservience of manners, fortitude and conscientiousness.* (Uma Alladi : 7) However, education infused necessary confidence in women and soon a large number of women entered many fields of social service like working for prison reforms, fighting against alcoholism, cruelty to children, slavery and fought for feminine causes like reforms in marriage and divorce laws. The Indian National Movement under the leadership of Gandhiji led to further emancipation of Indian women in the 20th Century by involving them in the struggle for political freedom of the country.

With the growth of educational and vocational opportunities, the educated middle and upper - class women, particularly in urban areas, have become conscious of their rights. More and more educational opportunities and employment avenues were thrown open to women. Exposure to reformist movements, economic independence, influence of western feminist movements, - all helped women to go a long way in bringing about drastic changes in their position and attitudes. Impelled by a desire to realize their aspiration for a new way of life, women began to voice their feelings freely. As Meena Shirwadkar observes:

As women received education they began to feel an increasing urge to voice their feelings. The awareness of individuality, the sense of compatibility with their tradition-bound

surroundings, resentment of male dominated ideas of morality and behaviour problems at home and at place of work or in society - all come up in a welter of projection. (Meena Shirwadker:201)

In order to move towards a discovery of independent identity and to break away from the colonial hangover, there was to be a return to the ethics of the indigenous tradition, which led to an excessive stress on orthodox social values. Women were encouraged to emulate the epic archetypes of Sita and Draupadi, who were symbolic of absolute fidelity. There was an anxiety to preserve the figure of woman as the epitome of all that was pure and chaste. Shanta Krishnaswamy, aptly remarks about the true state of Indian woman thus:

...as a child, is sold off to strangers for a bridal price or when she grows up, serves as a supplier of dowry for her husband's family or who, as a widow, in a final act of obliteration immolates herself on her dead husband's funeral pyre to be acclaimed as 'Sati Savithri', as an immortal. (Shanta Krishnaswamy : 2)

The Indian woman, in an age of alienation, of growing intellectual crisis, serves as a symbol, as a rallying point for the artist's dissatisfaction and disorientation with the status quo. The Indian women are now beginning to stir out of their placid stoicism. Arising political and social consciousness in a fertile milieu has brought them out into the open in protest, marching against discrimination and evils like, dowry deaths, rape and exploitation.

The deep rooted myths about women have not allowed them to lead an authentically free life. The disadvantaged position of women is seen to be perpetuated by the conventionally accepted critical perspectives. As Sukrita Paulkumar observes :

Woman is delineated as a mother and protector, as an inspirer and cherisher; as Shakti the primal force and as the chaste suffering wife or as a charmer. (Sukrita...42)

Indian society was under the impact of the West in the wake of Renaissance. The monumental 'Minute' of Macaulay prepared in 1833 provided for the adoption of English as medium of instruction in educational institutions, important offices and judicial courts. This opened up fresh avenues of thought in culture, art and literature, science and technology and hence was strongly backed by progressive thinkers. In the words of Macaulay:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons Indian in blood but English in taste, opinions, in morals, and in intellect. (Macaulay : 359)

There were specific activities in India during the 19th Century which enhanced the status of women under the reformist movement. It demanded more humane treatment for women. Liberal male crusaders, their wives and

a few British administrators worked against the cruel customs affecting women's lives. During the period of Indian Renaissance, nationalist spirit was kindled. There was more emphasis on humanitarianism. The strange encounter of the society with the West marked the beginning of a new civilization, the impact of which vastly benefited the Indian literature.

Exposure to reformist movements, economic independence and influence of Western feminist movements played significant role in bringing a change in the attitudes and position of women in India. Impelled by an urge to seek a new and just way of life, women began to voice freely their feelings and experiences. However, such women were a few in number, while a majority of women still conformed to the tradition-bound concept of womanhood mainly for the fear of ostracism. T.D.Brunton describes the Indian scene thus:

India had many of the cultural conditions favourable to the novel before she came into contact with the Europe. But now she has social forces actively favourable to the production of fiction - a large audience, an educated class, a new questioning of age old socio religious dogma and a consuming urge for knowledge and interpretation of society...". (T.D.Brunton: 214)

Born in the later half of the nineteenth century, fiction becomes a powerful form of literary expression and has acquired a prestigious position in the Indo-English literature. Rightly called as social document, "*The advent*

of the Indo - Anglian fiction coincided with a wave of patriotism and social reform including the amelioration of the status of women" (Meena : 2). To K.S.Ramamurthi the emergence of women writers during this period is of great significance and he remarks that "*it marks the birth of an era which promises a new deal for the Indian women*" (K.S. Rammorthy : 66). Further, he also recognizes the fact that the lot of the average Indian woman remained relatively unchanged, shackled by the superstitions and customs that are perpetuated in the name of tradition.

Women write differently from men. While men write about affairs of state, war, business, espionage, and sexual encounters, women write about themselves. The main contention is that there is such a thing as a distinctive woman's sensibility, and that it reflects itself in the literature of our times. Indian writing in English mirrors these concerns.

The pioneers of the novel in English made their appearance in the last quarter of the 19th Century. Bankim chandra Chatterjee had the distinction of writing the first Indian novel in English with his **Rajmohan's Wife**. Torulata Dutt (1856-1877) dealt with the archetypes of Indian womanhood like Sita and Savithri. Of the two novels of Toru, one is **Binaca**, (1878) in English, in which she gave vent to her true feelings about the attitudes of the Indian women and the other in French, **Le Journal de Mademoiselle d' Arvers**, (1879). Her creation of women characters in English reinforcing the conventional myth in a patriotic manner was a necessity in

contemporary society. She followed Raja Ram Mohan Roy in the social backwardness, stifling conformity and cruelty of Indian caste-society in the middle of the 19th century.

The thematic concerns of the early women writers led to the emergence of the Indian woman in the fast changing social milieu. Rajlakshmi Debi's **The Hindu Wife or The Enchanted Fruit** of (1876) raised a banner of revolt against the prevailing social conditions. Mrs.Krupabai Sathianandhan's (1862-1894) **Kamala : A Story of Hindu Wife** (1894) and **Saguna : A story of Native Christian Life** (1895) were autobiographical. **Saguna** was portrayed as a very bold young girl who encountered women missionaries of Zenana School and SB.Nikambe's **Ratnabai**, was a semi-autobiographical sketch with characteristic emphasis on subjectivity and private experience. Since these novelists lacked literary models, their work sometimes descended into sentimentality and didacticism. Rockey Sakhawat Hossain's (1880-1932) **Sultana's Dream** presented topsy turvy world in which men were kept behind purdahs. Man takes the status of a woman and the narrator had a caustic laugh at man. Pandita Ramabai Saraswati (1858-1922) is described as... "the greatest woman produced by modern India and one of the greatest Indians in all history - the one who laid the foundation for women's liberation in India" Ramabai wrote a book on the **High Caste Hindu Woman** in which she described a typical arranged marriage and aptly commented on the conjugal satisfaction of women in terms of their marriage. Susi Tharu and K. Lalitha observes:

When the conjugal relation is brightened by mutual love, the happy wife has nothing to complain except the absence of freedom of thought and action; but since wives have never known from the beginning what freedom is, they are well content to remain in bondage. (Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha : 247)

Swarna Kumari Ghosal, (1856 - 1932), elder sister of Rabindranath Tagore, was a novelist, poet, playwright, songwriter, and a journalist. The **Fatal Garland** (1910) **The Unfinished song** (1913) and **An Indian Love Story** (1910) were her major works. Her works mainly reflected the middle class milieu and as an editor of the journal **Bharathi**, she was mainly publishing scientific articles to educate the non-English Speaking Indian Women in new scientific concepts.

Swarna Kumari was one of the most distinguished literary figures of the time, and a torch bearer in the tradition of women's writing in Bengal.. The advent of Swarna Kumari on the literary scene of Bengal heralded a new era for women... She was the first writer to show up the strengths of women's writing and raise women's creations to a position of respect.

Cornelia Sorabji (1866-1954), the Oxford - educated lawyer, with a spirit of adventure and missionary zeal, fought for the cause of women, especially widows and women in purdahs. Her works, **Love and Life Behind the Purdahs** (1910) **Sun-Babies, Studies in the Child-life of India** (1904). **Behind the Twilights** (1908) **India Calling** (1935) and **India Recalled** (1936) served as instruments of social reform. Women in most of

the early novels are essentially Indian in sensibility, endowed with the traditional feminine qualities of sincerity, love and resignation. The autobiographical element in these novels, the transition from a concern with objective social reality to an exploration of the feminine sensibility find their echoes in the works of later women writers and as such they established their position as the forerunners of the Indian literary tradition in Indian English literature.

Thus first generation women novelists depicted woman who were traditional in outlook and resigned her to life. Under the influences of the popular British writers, these women's writings tended to be imitative while some focused on the romantic idealization- reformative zeal was the option for others. On the whole, these women writers wrote mainly to voice their concern for and sympathise with the suffering of Indian women rather than to censure the society. Hence, there was no room for anger, irritation, or tension in their works despite intense sociological and reformatory motivation.

The post - independence India witnessed a spurt of fiction writing by women writers of greater quality and depth. The period between 1915 and 1950 had not produced any significant woman writer. Consequently a clear gap of 35 years existed between the post-independence writers and their fore runners. These writers were more realistic in their approach than those of the first generation and were able to project a vision of their own.

Venu Chitale, the early post - independence novelist portrayed in her novel, **In Transit** (1950), the emotional trauma of a traditional middle - class

Brahmin widow weighed down by the age - old traditions and customs. Zeenuth Futehally's **Zohra** (1955) provided revealing glimpses into the muslim life, culture and manners. Shakuntala Shringesh took up a psychological study of her characters in her **The Little Black Box** (1955).

Kamala Markandaya is undoubtedly the most outstanding among the second generation women novelists. Her women protagonists are the repertoire of transitional Indian Society. She presents a cross section of the Indian society wherein her women characters go in quest for autonomy. The irregularities in the social system confine her women to time honoured and taboo-ridden path. The economic travails inherited in Indian Society further complicate their position adding to their inexperience, sickness, blind faith in their destiny which they accept as their 'Karma' . Thus her women, by and large, are conservative and traditional in outlook. But most of her women manage to be independent in thinking while performing their traditional roles.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala finds life in India to be an overwhelming burden to European women. Well aware of the changing values of the evolving Indian society, she portrays the predicament of the modern urban women who face the challenges of the contrasting cultures between the traditional Indian way of life and the western modernism. They are more concerned with their relationships with their partners than with women's rights or changing traditions. Though a majority of her women begin their married lives as non-conformists, very soon they learn to conform to traditions.

Santha Rama Rao appears to believe in the innate strength of the traditional Indian culture even when it comes in contact with the western culture. The characters are portrayed mostly with international background. She sketches her women characters as the ones who go in search of fulfilment and an attempt is also made to probe into the feminine psychology. Her women are mostly depicted as victims of political incidents and they are at times declared as war criminals. They aspire to have the experience of "living", and so they go in pursuit of artistic careers. The writer is an adept in characterising her protagonists with care and diligence. Like Jane Austen, she is quite at home in portraying women characters. As an Indian educated in the West, she brings to her task a wonderful balance.

Nayantara Sehgal delineates with keen perception and sensitivity the problems and suffering of women in marriage who feel entrapped, oppressed and doomed to the care of husband and home, and shows her own reaction in her novels. Most of her women are aware of the injustice done to them in marriage. As they go out of their homes, they go in quest of their freedom. While some accept their fate unhesitatingly, most of them crave for freedom. Nayantara Sehgal seeks to "*interpret the rigid concept of virtue and chastity through her women characters who have a kind of untouched innocence and integrity*".(Jasbir Jain : 67) Her women shield themselves with their virtuousness and courage to take risks of the unknown. In a way, Sehgal shows the need for a new morality in which a woman is treated as man's equal. In each of her novels "*she pleads for mutual trust, love, understanding*

consideration, generosity, and absence of pretence, selfishness and self-centredness in marital relationships". (Shyam : 66) Thus she is a champion of individual freedom with a penchant for the feminist cause.

The newly evolved and liberated women in the contemporary society really bloom and blossom in Raji Narasimhan's novels. In her three novels, **The Heart of Standing is You Cannot fly** (1973), **Forever Free** (1979), **The Sky Changes** (1991), liberated women characters are portrayed. Educated and able to live individually, they are not dependent on men. They live in working women's hostels where they are free from domestic responsibilities. Women who are away from parental restrictions are exposed to societal pressures and other exploitations. The heroine in her novel, **The Sky Changes** returns home after being separated from her husband and goes to fulfil her desire of blossoming as a writer. Krishna, the protagonist asserts herself "**My body is not my jail. It is my boat. I will row to freedom in my boat.**" (Raji : 30) She shows that crude expressions of sensuality can only jeopardize the hidden harmony between men and women. **The Sky Changes** is a novel of realisation and crystallization of the new women. The protagonist at the end says "*I dont know into what, towards what, I dont feel the need to know*". (Raji : 32)

Anita Desai differs from other women novelists through her method of the psychological exploration of her women protagonists who are essentially lonely and sensitive. The isolation and insecurity that her characters suffer is human, and the growth of women is from self alienation to self

identification. The psychic travails of the estranged self indicate a measured and specified movement from self desertion to self assertion. When her women characters are carefully scrutinized, they reveal that though they remain disintegrated and fragmented in the beginning finally they attain integration and harmony. It is the inner urge that springs from their self-identification that strikes a balance between the constructive and destructive aspects of self alienation. While she seeks social realities from the psychological perspective, she does not look at them as a social reformer or a moralist. It is Anita Desai who has added to Indian-English fiction an existentialistic dimension, a lyrical splendour and technical richness that were hitherto lacking. She has carved a special niche for herself in the world of Indo-English fiction. She is in the vanguard of a new generation of Indian writers who are experimenting with themes of inner consciousness.

Shashi Deshpande takes up for study the issues and problems of contemporary middle class women. Her heroines are sensitive, intelligent and career - oriented. She is one with Anita Desai and Nayantara Sehgal in not merely describing the pathetic life styles of Indian women but trying to understand and suggest measures for amelioration.

Bharathi Mukherjee, an Indian - American immigrant writer, liberates her women protagonists for a "new world order". Her portrayal of women is inspired by her experiences in India as well as abroad. Her protagonists are sensitive and they lack a stable sense of personal and cultural identity. They are victimized by racism, sexism and other forms of social oppression.

Bharathi Mukherjee is concerned with characters that strain and struggle for the articulation of their repressed and stunted voice. As a writer she likes to put much stress on the fact that her characters, whether they are uniquely Indian or superficially western, are basically human. Her women characters vent their feminine sensibility in their frantic desire for an authentic communication with their own selves as well as with the society.

Gita Hariharan, the distinguished recipient of the prestigious Commonwealth Award for her maiden novel, **The Thousand Faces of Night**, for the year 1993, portrays women who battle in their relationship with men and society. Her protagonist passes through a lacerating process of identity crisis. There is effective communication between the characters that keep her works flowing. Gita relates the relevance of Indian epic stories in the context of contemporary India scenario. Her women protagonists are the representatives of the present day intellectual women, and she does not confront them with problems like loneliness and alienation. At the end, they feel that they have but an ephemeral existence. Her characters are not only interesting to read, but are thought-provoking.

Uma Vasudev's women can be called truly liberated. They are not bothered by traditional middle-class attitudes, views, opinions and taboos which render them destitute and condemn them to live within the four walls of their homes. In her novels, **The Song of Anasuya** (1978) and **Shreya of Sonargarh** (1993), her characters are depicted as liberated women with their own clandestine affairs.

Jai Nimbkar's novels - **Temporary Answers** (1974) and **A Joint Venture** (1988) deal with the middle class married woman's identity crisis in the contemporary male-dominated Indian society. The protagonist in her first novel gives us a sense of lived reality, making the novel most autobiographical, authentic not only in terms of details of a 'lived life' but in terms of a psychological reality as well. Her protagonists in general suffer due to the existing inequality between the sexes.

Fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment in Indian English literature. The struggle to establish one's identity and to assert one's individuality has led the women to wage a desperate fight against the existing social order of the day. It is therefore, imperative for women to determine their new role and to redefine its parameters. The portrayal of women in literature helps them to do so as it provides them with role models drawn from the sufferings of the women characters, harassed under the chauvinistic male domination. Their thematic concerns and ideological preoccupations paved way to establish the synchronic and diachronic developments and continuity in the construction of the subjectivity of women. The similarities and dissimilarities in the writers' perceptions of the selfhood of women, given their different socio-cultural milieu, suggest a continuum of different possible responses.

Shashi Deshpande is a graduate in Economics and Law, and a post graduate in English Literature. She has also taken a course in journalism. She worked on a magazine before beginning her literary career which began in 1970, spanning almost 28 years and encompassing her authorship of seven novels, four volumes of short stories besides a number of

story books for children. Her first published novel, **Roots and Shadows**, has won the Thirumathi Rangamal prize for the best Indian novel of 1982-83. **That Long Silence**, published in Britain by Virago, has won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award and it has been translated into the French and the Dutch languages. Another of her novels **The Dark Holds No Terrors** has also been translated into the German and the Russian languages. Her collection of short stories entitled **The Legacy** has been prescribed for study in the Columbia University, U.S.A. Her novels, by and large, deal with -

*Well-educated, hard working people in secure jobs,
cushioned by insurance and provident funds, with
two healthy well-fed children going to good schools.*
(TLS : 5)

She portrays modern, educated and career-oriented middle-class women who are sensitive to the changing times and situations. They are aware of the social and cultural disabilities to which they are subjected in the male-dominated society. They want to rebel against them in their search for freedom and identity, but they find themselves up against well-entrenched social inertia. Conscious of the predicament of a woman in a male-dominated society, especially when she is not economically independent, the author presents her women as desiring to become economically and ideologically independent. She finds them caught up in a conflict between their family and professional roles, between individual aspirations and social demands. Indu (RS) and Jaya (TLS), being women writers, are torn between self-expression and social stigmas-

material and psychological. As Maria Mies observes, *"Her problem arises firstly, from the contradictions between this image and the demand of a social situation and then from the discrepancy between new aspirations and lack of opportunity. (Mies : 130)* Her women like Saru succeed in overcoming social stigmas asserting their potential in the professional arena. Deshpande's career women

...are not satisfied with the rhetoric of equality between man and woman but want to see that the right to an individual life and the right to development of their individual capabilities are realized in their own lives. (Mies : 130)

Shashi Deshpande's women stand at the cross-roads of tradition. They seek change but within the cultural norms, seek not to reinterpret them but merely to make them alive with dignity and self-respect. Her women seek anchorage in marriage. They perceive it as an alternative to the bondage imposed by the parental family and opt for it. Soon thereafter, they realise that one restrictive set-up is replaced by another *"New bonds replace the old, that's all"* (RS 14). Her women protagonists are caught in the conflict between responsibility to oneself and conformity to the traditional role of wife. They do not accept to be considered merely as the objects of gratification. They challenge their victimization and seek a new balance of power between the sexes. Yet their concept of freedom is not imported from the West. They believe in conformity and compromise for the sake of the retention of domestic harmony rather than revolt which might result in the disruption of family relationships.

Deshpande's woman protagonist generally seeks to come out -

...from inherited patterns of thought and action in favour of new modes, arrived at independently after much consideration of the various aspects of the problem, keeping also in view the kind of society she lives in. (Viney Kirpal : 148)

A glimpse of her novels reveals how poignantly she expresses the frustrations and disappointments of women who experience social and cultural oppression in the male-dominated society. **Roots and Shadows**, her first novel, highlights the agony and trauma experienced by women in a male-dominated and tradition-bound society. The novelist exposes the absurdity of rituals and customs which only help to perpetuate the myth of male superiority. This shows how a woman grows from 'self-surrender' and 'self-abnegation' to assert her individuality with newly emerged identity. **The Dark Holds No Terrors** rejects the traditional concept that the sole purpose of a wife's existence is to please her husband. It reveals a woman's capacity to assert her own rights and individuality and become fully aware of her potential as a human being. **That Long Silence** traces the passage of a woman through a maze of doubts and fears towards her affirmation. Viewing the man-woman relationship objectively, the novelist does not throw the blame entirely on men for the subjugation of women. She observes that both men and women find it difficult to outgrow the images and roles allotted to them by society.

The Binding Vine shows how the educated earning woman helps a poor woman thereby inculcates the spirit of solidarity among women. The novelist depicts the agony of a wife who is the victim of marital rape. She also portrays the plight of women raped outside marriage who would rather suffer in silence in the name of family honour. **A Matter of Time**, Shashi Deshpande's latest novel, portrays a woman who is more mature and dignified than her predecessors. While others cannot think of themselves outside the familial bond, she, finding herself in, is unperturbed. Being a little detached, she manages herself admirably and almost becomes self-dependent.

Shashi Deshpande's concern about the problems of women and their quest for identity makes one to consider her novels as feminist texts. But she disapproves the idea to label her novels as feminist texts and says:

A woman who writes of women's experience often brings in some aspects of those experiences that have angered her, roused her strong feelings. I don't see why this has to be labelled feminist fiction. (Shashi Deshpande : 33)

She also vehemently objects to being called a feminist. P. Rama Moorthy remarks, in this context, that ".....the women she has created are feminists, if she is not one". (P. Rama Moorthy : 7) Later, she changes her stand and admits herself to be a feminist but only as a person and certainly not as a novelist. She declares in an interview her stance on the issue : *I now have no doubts*

at all in saying that I am a feminist. In my own life, I mean. But not consciously, as a novelist. I must also say that my feminism has come to me very slowly, very gradually, and mainly out of my own thinking and experiences and feelings. I started writing first, and only then discovered my feminism. And it was much later that I actually read books about it. (Lakshmi Holmstrom : 248)

Further elucidating her viewpoint, she declares :

*... I am a feminist, I'm a very staunch feminist in my personal life... cruelty and oppression should not be there between the two genders, this is my idea of feminism. I am a feminist very much and I strongly react against any kind of cruelty or oppression, denial of opportunities to women because they are women... The important thing is we are all human beings and we should all have the right to live ourselves. But as a writer I'm not going to use my novels to carry the message of feminism. Then it becomes propaganda...".
(interview with Prasanna Sree : xiii-xiv)*

She, more or less, affirms the same opinion in another interview when she says : "My objection was to being called a feminist writer". (Interview with Gita Gangadharan : 254)

The same view is endorsed by Suneetha who observes : "... It would be unfair to label her 'feminist' She can at best be called an articulator of women

who are caught at the crossroads of change in a society which is undergoing the birthpangs of transition from tradition to modernity". (Y.S. Suneetha : 28) Hers is not militant or strident feminism. She does not subscribe to the "...false idea of liberation that you don't need a family, ...we are all part of society and we need some ties...." (Interview with S. Prasanna Sree : xiii-xiv).

More than being a feminist she is a humanist. Her views are more akin to the modern feminist thought which is no longer radical. She expresses her desire to be a humanist in an interview given to Vanamala Viswanatha :

...I want to reach a stage where I can write about human beings and not about women in relation to men. I don't believe in having a propagandist or sexist purpose to my writing. If it presents such perspective, it's only a coincidence (Interview with Vanamala Viswanatha : 237).

Shashi Deshpande describes, in unequivocal terms, her idea of feminism. To a question from an interviewer whether she would like to call herself now a feminist, she reacts thus :

"Yes, I would, I am a feminist in the sense that, I think we need to have a world, which we should recognise as a place for all of us human beings. There is no superior and inferior; we are two halves of one species. I fully agree with Simone de Beauvoir that 'the fact that we are human is much more important than our being men and women'. I think that's my idea of feminism. (Geetha Gangadharan : 254)

Thus Shashi Deshpande is a writer par excellence when she deals with 'human issues which are of interest to all humanity'. She effectively portrays the lot of Indian women and the convoluted state of things resulting in their self-abnegation in her writings known for courageous and sensitive handling of significant and intractable themes affecting the lives of women. Her works therefore constitute an outstanding contribution to Indian literature in English.

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Chapter - 2

Roots and Shadows

INDU : THE ARCHITECT OF HER OWN FATE

... I must take steps to educate myself.
You are not the man to help me there.
That's something I must do on my own.

- *Henrik Ibsen*

For ages, woman lived under the protection of either parents or husband or her children. This pattern of living, even though made her life safe and smooth, in reality, drove her into an unenviable state of slavery and dependence. The new education has awakened her to her real self. As a result of this, she starts craving for independent and self-reliant status in life. And in order to achieve this, she begins to shed her timidity and shun abject surrender to the protective cover provided by man. The modern, educated young woman questions the man's wilful unconcern for woman's wishes, likes and dislikes. Until the sixties and seventies man alone was looked upon as bread- winner and woman was confined to the household. In the modern era, woman too makes money independently. She not only earns money but also attends to her household chores. Undoubtedly, the modern, educated young woman's struggle against the age old slavery, suffering and suppression is a welcome development. But, this striving of the modern woman to be free and self-reliant is often debilitated by her timidity and diffidence. In the course of this crusade, she suffers from certain weaknesses and complexes which have been very honestly highlighted by the Indian women novelists. Their "...

heroines are all agog to retain their individuality in the teeth of disintegrating and divisive forces that threaten their identity". (Swain : 86)

The new education has gradually made her conscious of futility or emptiness of the various long-preserved notions and taboos about the woman, and she has started opposing and breaking them. And this crusade at times makes her feel alone and alienated. This new woman is Indu, the woman protagonist of Shashi Deshpande's first published novel, **Roots and Shadows**. Indu, an educated young woman, is highly sensitive. She starts aspiring to become independent and complete in herself. She brushes aside all the age-old beliefs and superstitions prevalent in the society. As a motherless child, she was tended by the members of the joint family who never denied her any amount of care and affection. Old uncle, Kaka, Atya and other family members always cushioned her position in the family. But now she finds the dominant Akka, a senior member and a mother surrogate in the novel, and even the family to be a hindrance in achieving her goal of attaining independence and completeness. Indu, from a very tender age, has always hated Akka for her narrow- mindedness. She resents her for not going to the hospital for, as she says, "*God knows what caste the nurses are,... or the doctors. I couldn't drink a drop of water there*". (21) Akka is like Mrs. Quest of Doris Lessing's **Martha's Quest** in forbidding Indu's meeting boys. Indu rebels against the suffocating authority of Akka and the oppressive atmosphere of the family where women have no choice but to submit and accept their lot. Right from her childhood, it is dinned into Indu's mind by the women members of the family that she is a

female and that she has to conform to the pattern of behaviour expected of females, but Indu resents this :

As a child, they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive. (158)

Ruth Prawer Jhabwala's women are also modern in outlook just as Indu but their modernity is only skin-deep unlike hers. While Amrita of **To Whom She Will** and Nimmi of **The Nature of Passion** display craze for modernism without real conviction, and Kusum of **Get Ready for Battle** and Etta of **A Backward Place** are rebellious only when they find social conventions as impediments to their personal benefits, Indu deliberately seeks to liberate herself from the shackles of traditional roles. But, Indu is more or less akin to Nayantara Sahgal's women - Kusum of **A Time to be Happy**, Rashmi of **This Time of Morning**, Saroj of **Storm in Chandigarh**, Simrit of **A Day in Shadow** and Sonali of **Rich Like us** - for whom freedom does not merely signify the defiance of old - established traditions and conventions but in reality it lies in becoming aware of oneself as an individual.

The exaggerated importance assigned to a woman in terms of virginity is also responsible to a great extent in enforcing strict restrictions on her

movements as soon as she reaches the age of puberty and as the girl matures, her mother's authority weighs more heavily upon her. Indu bitterly recollects how crudely the idea of her womanhood was thrust upon her:

My womanhood... I had never thought of it until the knowledge had been thrust brutally, gracelessly on me the day I had grown up. 'You're a woman now', Kaki had told me. "You can have babies yourself. I, a woman? My mind had flung off the thought with an amazing swiftness. I was only a child. And then, she had gone on to tell me, badly, crudely, how I could have a baby. And I, who had all the child's unselfconsciousness about my own body, had, for the first time, felt an immense hatred for it. And don't forget', she had ended, 'for four days now you are unclean. You can't touch any one or anything'. (79)

She starts fighting against her womanhood, she hates the utter feminity of the girl's hostel where she resides, and narrates the incidents that reveal the tactlessness of her relatives in that period of traumatic, pubertal transitions. The idea that her body is unclean has been planted in her mind. Indu develops an aversion to the natural biological functions of the female as mother and has an apathy towards bearing a child. She develops a vague sense of guilt and feels that her womanhood closes so many doors for her.

Simone De Beauvoir observes :

For an adolescent girl, her first menstruation reveals this meaning and her feelings of shame appear. If they were already present, and they are strengthened and exaggerated from this time on.
(Beauvoir : 335)

Indu differs from Narmada Atya, Kaki, Sumitra, Kamala, Sunanda and Kaku who follow tradition as a virtue. They strongly believe in age-old conventions and practices. She also differs from Mini who though educated, lacks will power and hence, sacrifices her individuality. Though Mini is deeply aware of her peculiar position, she makes no efforts to come out of the tangles of the society and be independent. Indu, on the other hand, rebels against the narrow conventions and more particularly, the tyrannical authority of Akka on matters of education, love and marriage. She reacts : "... *there was only one thing she wanted and that was to dominate*" (68), and for her it is "*A Declaration of Independence*". (68)

Defying the traditional role she is expected to play, Indu seeks fulfilment in education and career. She works as a journalist for a woman's magazine but gives it up out of disgust for writing only about women and their problems and starts working for another magazine. As Indu explains the reason for shift :

Women, women, women... I got sick of it. There was nothing else. It was a kind of narcissism. And as if we had locked ourselves in a cage and thrown away the key. I couldn't go on. (78)

Indu strives to seek a new environment where nobody, especially people like Akka, can exercise their wills on her. She marries Jayant, a man of different caste but of her own choice and leaves her parental home. In her very first meeting with Jayant, she is swept off her feet. He gives her a feeling of solidity and certainty. She hopes that her marriage with Jayant would enable her to realise the need "to belong", to be "wanted", 'needed' and 'loved' and, as she desired, the most primary thing for her is to own the freedom to express her true self to the world. But she painfully realises that she has walked into just another trap. She does not heed the warning of Akka, who has no good opinion of intercaste marriages, *"Such marriages never work. Different castes, different languages... it's all right for a while. Then they realise..."* (68) Indu leaves her ancestral house and enters into another to be independent and complete but very soon, she realises the fruits of her decision. In the words of Indu: *"Jayant and I... I wish I could say we have achieved complete happiness. But I cannot fantasise. I think of the cries that had filled me earlier... I want to be loved, I want to be happy. The cries are now stilled"*. (13) She feels that she had been deceived and made to hide her feelings *"as if they were bits of garbage"*. (38) Her marriage with Jayant suppresses her femininity and her human demands. She is physically and spiritually dissatisfied with her husband who takes her for granted and expects her "to submit". Her love towards Jayant makes Indu to accept what he wants and does. Her love marriage degenerates into a mere psychological affair and makes her feel that she has abused her body's sanctity. She realises that her marriage with Jayant has denied her of the fullness of

experience and, therefore satisfaction or happiness. The paradox of the situation is that Indu is not completely happy with Jayant, but at the same time, she cannot live without him. Indu speaks about her own incompleteness when she says:

This is my real sorrow. That I can never be complete in myself. Until I had met Jayant I had not known it... that there was, somewhere outside me, a part of me without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant. And lost the ability to be alone. (31)

After her marriage with Jayant, Indu attends to all the things apparently intended to please him. She says:

When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant. When I undress, I think of him. Always what he wants. What he would like. What would please him. And I can't blame him. It's not he who has pressurised me into this, It's the way I want it to be. (49)

Being tied up in marriage with Jayant, Indu comes to realise that it is because of him that her life is meaningful in one view and also meaningless in another view. And she wonders why she is trying to please him all the time, "*Have I become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own*".(49) She has sworn never to conform to the concept of the ideal woman as represented by

her aunts and other tradition - oriented female relatives-the one who does not have an independent identity, a woman who sheds her 'I' and loses her identity to her husband's. But Indu realises that with her marriage to Jayant, she has in fact conformed to the notion of the ideal woman. The conventional rituals performed by her orthodox female relatives in order to secure safety and long life for their husbands are ridiculed by Indu. Accordingly, she is determined never to perform such self-effacing rituals that justify her existence only in relation with a man. But her introspective assessment of her marriage makes her realize that she is in reality not very different from her conventional relatives and that by shaping herself to suit her husband's model of a wife, she is unconsciously falling in line with the traditional women performing self-effacing rituals, she is dead set against.

Indu, who considers herself independent and intelligent, who is proud of her logical and rational thinking and who sets out to reform Indian womanhood, has become, after her marriage, one of those archetype, submissive Indian women whose identity is only an extension of her husband's. Perhaps marriage has taught her things like deception and pretentious show. Her desire to assert herself has driven her from affection to hypocrisy. On the other hand, Jayant, in spite of his seemingly western style of life, behaves no different from an average Indian male. Her marriage makes her feel that there was something shameful in total commitment.

It shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off. When I'm like that, he turns away from

*me. I've learnt my lesson now. And so I pretend.
I'm passive. And unresponsive. (83)*

Consequently, Indu learns to repress her sexual desire to maintain the status quo in her marriage. While Jayant effectively desexualizes Indu in refusing to accept her sexual personality and indirectly moulds her identity according to his prescriptions, Indu articulates her sexual confusion, "A woman who loves her husband too much. Too passionately. And is ashamed of it". (83) Indu realises that her overwhelming love for Jayant is disturbing and her total self-surrender to him is frightening. She fears that she is turning into an "ideal" Indian wife only obeying her husband's wishes and fancies. At one stage she even contemplates leaving her husband, not because she doesn't love him but because she loves him "too much" and is ashamed of her love and her total dependence on her husband. It makes her feel like an anachronism. She hopes she can be her whole self again by being away from him and living by herself. She says : "Sometimes I wonder if I will leave him one day and live by myself. The only way in which I can be myself, my whole self again". (88-89) But she hangs on to her marriage and beneath her passive and unquestioning submission lies her unwillingness to acknowledge her love marriage as a failure.

Indu is like Vineetha of Jai Nimbkar's **Temporary Answers** in rejecting the idea of woman as inferior to man. Vineetha wishes to entrust her life once again into a man's hands after her husband's death. Indu, on the other hand, has an affair with Naren, her cousin, which fades away with his

death. She very much desires to live on her own without Jayant's support but, she realises, at the same time, that she cannot live without him.

Indu recollects that she has surrendered herself to Jayant step by step, not mainly for love but to avoid conflict and that she has clung tenaciously to Jayant, to her marriage, not for love alone, but because she is afraid of failure and, moreover, she wants to show to the world and her family that she is a success. She resorts to deception by putting up a facade of happy married life which, as she feels, has taken its toll on her personality. She looks upon marriage as a system which makes one so dependent. She considers love to be a big fraud, a hoax, a trap - a process of making one humble and dependent. To her, "sexual instinct", "maternal instinct", "self love", "self interest" appear rational and meaningful. Among the many compromises that she has made in order to keep up the semblance of a happy marriage, the most distressing one is that she has given up, her ambition of being a writer, on her own. Further, as a creative writer and working in a magazine, she loses her enthusiasm to write on being forced by the editor to suppress facts and present a glossy picture to the readers. Angered by the editor's attitude, she is even more hurt when her husband, instead of supporting her, asks her to compromise and commands her not to resign her job. He says :

'That's life! what can one person do against the whole system! No point making a spectacle of yourself with futile gestures. We need the money, don't we? Don't forget, we have a long way to go'.

(17)

When Indu is at the cross-roads of her life with her sense of certainty, confidence and assurance withering away, she gets the opportunity to go back to her ancestral home like Tara of Anita Desai's **Clear Light of the Day** who has a chance to review her life. In contrast to Indu, Mini, Indu's cousin at her ancestral home, prefers to adopt the traditional life style. She seeks refuge in the traditional ways of life, for there is no other way out for her. When Indu asks her about her choice of marrying, Mini's passive acceptance shocks her. Mini says : *'What choice do I have, Indu'? ... 'of course I'm marrying him because there's nothing else you can do'.* (125) Marriage, in the traditional Indian society, only means fear, agony and frustration on the girl's side. Indu learns from Mini that nothing could endure except compromise and that she has to learn to be content with her lot. In the words of Mini :

Any man, Indu? Yes, any man. Any man who says yes'. You don't know what it has been like. Watching Kaka and Hemant and even Madhav - Kaka running around after eligible men... if the horoscopes matched, there was the meeting to be arranged. And all those people coming... and asking all kinds of questions... and they would say, "she's not modern enough" ... "she's too fashionable for us". Or too short, Or too tall, Or too dark, Or something... And I, feeling as if I had committed a great crime by being born a girl... I am tired Indu. I don't care what kind of a man he is. Once we are married, and he becomes by husband, none of his flaws will matter. (126)

While staying at her ancestral house, Indu reviews the things of the past. She learns that Akka's life is a stunning example of how a woman has been subjected to frustration and disappointment. As Atya narrates Akka's silenced streaks to Indu, she realises that she has not really made good effort to understand and analyse Akka and her behaviour. She understands how, in the name of child marriages, women like Akka were treated inhumanly and beastly.

Indu was brought up in a family where tradition under the patriarchal roof is strongly supported and straying from it is considered a treacherous act. On the contrary, since education and modernity are slowly creeping into the younger generation, specially among the people like Indu, tradition is anathema to them. Kaka tells Indu, "*...elders were to be feared, respected, obeyed. We used to sit up when they entered the room, and touch their feet when we went out; ... You youngsters now... you're a different breed altogether*". (46) Indu knows how women in the patriarchal social set-up are subjected to ill-treatment and humiliation and how the situation becomes even worse when unfortunately a woman loses her husband. The burden of widowhood is forcibly thrust and violation of the set rules condemns the woman's life to the position of outcasts. Widowed women should get their heads tonsured; otherwise, their status is reduced and orthodox widows would not eat food cooked by them.

Indu's decision to cut off all family ties is a conscious choice to break out of the confining cage of subordinate womanhood. She is cognizant of the fact that her female relations have succumbed to the dictates of male authority and she says:

...years of blindfolding can obscure your vision so that you no more see the choices. Years of shackling can hamper your movement so that you can no more move out of your cage of no-choices. (125)

She is made deeply aware of her own shortcomings in terms of being a complete woman in the eyes of those conventional women who have their own standards of judging people.

Nothing about me... my academic distinctions, my career, my success, my money... none of these would impress her. To her I was just a childless woman. To get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grand children... they were still for them only successes a woman could have. I had almost forgotten this breed of women since I had left home. (116)

She refuses to be a mother of a child, though she acknowledges the truth of the maternal instinct. She does not welcome a child wholeheartedly. Her non-real marriage and non-real love makes her feel trapped in a negative situation as it starts to shatter her positive struggle to be independent for

selfhood and intellectual liberation. Female sexuality is feared as a threat which undermines a woman's own honour and that of her family. Religious tenets and cultural ethics have always emphasized the child-bearing function of woman and condemned her pursuit of sexual pleasure. Woman is, therefore, enforced to be sexually passive and submissive even towards her own spouse and as a quester for sexual satisfaction, woman is not ethically accepted. Finding her sexual personality repressed within her marital relationship Indu strives for expression and acceptance through an extra-marital affair with her cousin, Naren:

I can go back and lie on my bed, I thought and it will be like erasing the intervening period and what happened between Naren and me. But deliberately went to my bed and began folding the covers. I don't need to erase anything I have done, I told myself in a fit of bravado. (152)

This bold assertion of her has sparked off contradictory statements. In the words of P. Rama Moorthy:

This sheds a brilliant light on Indu's awareness of her autonomy and her realization that she is a being, and not a dependent on Jayant. The novel gains its feminist stance in Indu's exploration into herself but it also moves beyond the boundaries of feminism into a perception of the very predicament of human existence. (Ramamoorthy : 124)

But P. Bhatnagar has a totally different perspective. In fact what Indu has committed is never to be accepted in a traditional family set up. She says...

Indu's casual and matter-of-fact attitude to what she had done is shocking. Have our morals really gone so low that women commit this sin for nothing, just to prove that they do not lack courage? Is this really representative of modern Indian woman? (Bhatnagar : 129)

Perhaps by presenting Indu in a more deliberate way, Shashi Deshpande answers the double standards adopted in our society, where men alone take liberties seeking sexual pleasure even though they are married. According to Manu, a wife must ever remain devoted to her husband and always please him while he is alive. After his death, she should never think of any other man. Even though the husband be of bad character and seeks pleasure elsewhere, he must be constantly worshipped as god by a faithful wife. A vicious husband must be worshipped, but bad wife may at any time be superseded by another wife. Though the widow is enjoined to remain faithful to her husband's memory, a husband after having lost his wife may marry again and again. In such a society, the sexual emancipation on the part of Indu is evidently an assertion of her individuality, her newly emerged identity.

Impressed by Naren's air of detachment, she feels she may achieve her freedom and fulfilment if she can become detached like him. Her mind keeps

harping on this theme of detachment and she wonders if she will ever reach that stage, a stage of "... no passions, no emotions and unruffled placidity". Indu experiences a sense of freedom in her relationship with Naren. She feels a need to open up to him, and therefore, she talks about herself and her failures. The newly acquired sense of freedom that Naren's friendship gives her, makes her give into her natural impulses. She who had rejected Naren in the beginning when he tried to make love to her saying she is essentially monogamous, but, later, offers herself twice to Naren with total abandonment. Though she doesn't mind love-making as a sin or crime, the next day she starts thinking of the enormity of what she had done:

Adultery... what nuances of wrongdoing... no, it needs the other, stronger word... what nuances of sin the word carries. I will now brood on my sin, be crushed under a weight of guilt and misery. (155)

She anatomises each and every action in terms of situation that paved way for her involvement with Naren. Her mind further oscillates over matters like sin, crime, right and wrong. In her own words, Indu says :

A part from wronging Jayant? Wronging Jayant? I winced at the thought. But had I not wronged Jayant even before this? By pretending, by giving him a spurious coin instead of the genuine kind? I had cheated him of my true self. That, I thought, is dishonourable, dishonest, much more than this, what I have done with Naren. (171)

Words like love have got no meaning to her. In other words, to her there is no such thing as love in real life though that exists in books and movies. When Naren asks her what the truth about love is, she answers:

The sexual instinct... that's true. The maternal instinct... that's true too. Self interest, self love... they're the basic truths. You remember Devadas? I saw it with some friends. They sobbed when he died for love. But I could have puked. A grown man moaning and crying for love! God! How disgusting!
(158)

Young modern women like Indu are sandwiched between tradition and modernity. Those who leave behind the convention and take the initiative to join modernity are entangled as Maria Mies observes :

The non-conforming conduct of the women is not the consequence of an external necessity but of changed consciousness. They are not satisfied with the rhetoric of equality between man and woman, but want to see that the right to an individual life and the right to development of their individual capabilities are realized in their own lives. (Mies:29)

After Naren's death, Indu discovers through old uncle that beneath the veneer of his care-a-damn attitude, Naren was a person with strong feelings, expectations and disappointments and that he preferred disappointment and

suffering to negation of feelings. She also learns from the old uncle that one need not be ashamed of their attachments, as nobody can escape from them and that attachments and love are the law of life. He reminds her that the world is made up of interdependent parts, therefore depending on others is natural, and need not be regretted. Old uncle also makes her realise that freedom and fulfilment can be achieved by those who have the right perception of life and abide by certain rules of life. There have to be some rules so that life can have both dignity and grace. One can always find measures of freedom within these rules. This knowledge gives Indu a new perception of life. She understands the true meaning of freedom and fulfilment, for marriage to her appears to be only a means to procreate:

Behind the facade of romanticism, sentiment and tradition, what was marriage after all, but two people brought together... to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generations might continue? (3)

According to Indu, one should listen to the dictates of one's own conscience and be true to one self in speech as well as in action. Indu realises her position in her ancestral house, the responsibilities, fears and frustrations do not touch her. The turmoil and distaste that had filled her slowly begin to seep out of her. She is viewed as an assertive woman with an emerging new self. Through Naren's preaching of detachment, she is able to rebuild her lost vision. She suddenly realises what she lacks, "*I knew in that instant what it was that my life had lacked. It was the quality of courage*". (150)

Slowly, Indu realises that there was nothing shameful in her feelings for Jayant. It did not make her less of a human being. The whole world is made up of interdependence. She wants to project her true self to Jayant instead of the pretentious one she has been showing to him all these days. There is an air of affinity and responsibility in the things Indu does. Indu reflects :

Here, in this house, in this family, was a role waiting for me. A role that I could, perhaps, act out more successfully than the one I had tried until now. For, had I not, so very often, felt myself just a mouthing, grimacing puppet, dully saying the lines I had to, feeling, actually, nothing? Had I not felt myself flat, one-dimensional, just a blurred figure merging into the background? Whereas here, I would stand out, sharp and clear... (143)

Indu is now able to reconsider her feelings towards Akka who in her opinion was “indomitable and bigoted”. Indu realizes that Akka knew that she would be able to show indomitable courage and strength thus fulfilling her responsibilities and that she must seek freedom within the bonds of obligations and responsibilities. For Indu wants ... *to live without fear..., fear of being unloved, misjudged, misunderstood, displeasing. Without the fear of failure. (174)*

Akka's decision of making Indu guardian to her property leads to much consternation among her relatives. Their wants are unending, their love is

hypocritical, their affection is filled with jealousy, hatred and envy. As Indu observes :

There are strong and the weak. And the strong have to dominate the weak. It's inevitable. And Akka thought I was one of the strong ones. That's why she put the burden on me. And now, it is an obligation. I have to carry the burden. And to do that, I have to be hard. If I'm soft, I'll just cave in.
(159)

To a woman like Indu these feelings are difficult to stomach. It is a kind of defeat and surrender, for the truth is that in the politics of a family, one can see their quest for money and power. Indu is now an autonomous being, capable of, through trial and error, and now she is heading to find her own way to salvation. Indu's musings on life and her problems also reveal the truth that she has been running after shadows (illusions) in search of happiness, and that the source of her unhappiness is her roots (tradition). She has been told since her childhood about her role in life as a female. She has rebelled against this traditional role for fear of becoming like one of her predecessors at home. She tries to prove to the world that she is first and foremost an individual, who is capable of making her own decision, and achieving success. It is a fear of suppression by the patriarchal society that makes her fight, turn aggressive and assert herself. "*I would be most emphatically myself. Indu*" (143). Until and unless the roots, which are the source of her fears are not uprooted, Indu cannot achieve fulfilment, she therefore decides to destroy the roots, eliminate her fears, confront her

problems with courage and what she feels is right. She also learns to see life in a fresh light. Indu extends support to Vital, an orphan living with the family. In fact, Indu seems to be grown up with better understanding of the situation than that existed earlier in the family.

Indu's search now is towards detachment. Her mind keeps in tune to the theme of 'detachment and loneliness'. In her heart of hearts, she wonders whether she would ever reach the stage of 'no passions, no emotions, and unruffled placidity'. She realises that she has attached and involved herself in multiple ways like any other human being. She also yearns for the support of her family members. She expects others to show concern for her. When her father says that he has met Jayant she expects him to say that Jayant is pining for her, but her father's answer *wonderful, oh, wonderful*"(92)... irritates her: Similarly when Naren says that he is going back to his work, the word echoes in her mind and she feels like a deserted and abandoned child. She tries to draw herself more towards the sense of detachment as was emphasized by Naren very often but realises painfully her failure and shakes off the feelings of detachment. She is aware that what she wants is not "*this very not - caring*" but involvement. "*I wanted involvement, not detachment*" (89) She affirms :

Now I felt clean, as if I had cut away all the unnecessary, uneven edges of myself. And free. But not detached. I would, I knew, never hanker after detachment any more. The very word brought back Naren's eyes as he lay on the grass near the

tank. Detachment... it was for the dead, not the living. (186)

This prompts P. Bhatnagar to comment that :

It was Naren who made her realize that she did not want, as she had believed earlier, detachment and non-involvement. Naren's detachment made it possible for him to remain unaffected by anything. He could never be anybody's husband or beloved. Her rejection of him had left him completely untouched, whereas she knew she could shatter Jayant completely with her rejection which made Jayant so precious to her. No, she did not want detachment and non-involvement which are meant for the dead not for the living. (Bhatnagar : 125)

Indu now understands that her love is not a restricting but a uniting bond which shall lead her to lose herself to Jayant, so that their lives shall be full of harmony and peace. Indu's vision gets cleared as she decides to reveal to Jayant her whole self, her weaknesses and her strengths, her virtues and vices as well. This understanding makes her position clear in her family. As Jayant says "*But then, new pillars take the place of the old. You're a pillar now yourself, don't you know? Am I? Yes, that's true* ". (11) Akka makes Indu her successor as she knows that among all her relatives, Indu is the only strong one who can bear the burden of the responsibility that goes with the wealth. Indu realises that she has to live up to Akka's expectations and carry the burden. She also realises that Akka is not merely an interfering old woman, she is the prop of the family.

With the simplicity of will,' a legacy' made to her by Naren, Indu decides to fulfil the obligations she has towards the family and towards herself. She ignores the letter from her husband advising her to leave the members of the family who do not bother about her for ten years and return home so that together they can make plans for their future with Akka's money. But Indu resolves to use it the right way. She decides to finance Mini's wedding instead of buying the old house which had already outlived its life. It pains her to think that the house, where she spent eighteen years of her life, would be demolished without a trace by its new owner Shankarappa. But, Indu understands the truth in Shankarappa words when he says that the house had a good life, and now it should have a clean end. and adds, *even a man can't ask for more than that.*(185)

Soon the new bonds and obligations crowned with responsibilities make her understand and appreciate that rules add grace and dignity to life. The old house which Indu considers to be a trap, now gets ready to be disposed of to Shankarappa who wants to construct a big hotel. Though the decision-making is painful for Indu, soon she overcomes the pain. She reminiscences the feelings and the emotions that are associated with the house in which she lived but not stayed. Though overcome by a sense of desolation and bereavement, she reminds herself that she must not allow soft feelings to come in her way of doing what she thinks was the right thing to do, "... *One era ends so that the other might begin. But life will continue endless, limitless, formless and full of grace*". (*Bhatnagar : 127*)

Money plays an important role to bridge the gender gap and to raise one's position. She decides to get Mini married to a better man and not to the one chosen by Akka and pay for her wedding. She decides to help the old and deserving and be discriminate and judicious. She also understands the need to educate women. She has wealth, intelligence and freedom. She is able to negate all feminine limitations and acquires power to change others "... *how the darkness inside me was banished, replaced instead, by a gentle kindly dawn*". (179)

Indu resembles Geeta of Rama Mehta's **Inside the Haveli**, the educated urban woman, who also overcomes the feeling of suffocation and becomes an agent of change. Like Jayant, Ajay too realizes his wife's worth as an individual and says, "*You did the right thing. I am proud of you...*" (ITH : 142) Geeta plays a positive role and becomes an illustration of the slow change through conformity going on in our society.

Indu learns that there is beauty and security in life through reconciliation. She is happy when Jayant tells her that he is prepared to publish her work if no publisher comes forward. She cries, "*Happiness, I never knew it was made up of such little things*". (13) Harmony and understanding of the mind that facilitates between conflicting selves and the opposing ideals is the true basic Indian attitude. Indu is seen exercising her potential self to a fuller use by asserting herself as an individual, pushing aside all her fears and doubts about herself. Moreover she continues to maintain her individuality in a house full of tradition bound men and women. Indu's predicament is representative of the larger predicament of women in contemporary Indian society where the society from old cultural modes is in transition moving along with new socio-economic forces acting effectively on

the pattern of human lives. Indu represents any woman placed in transitional period who is torn between age old traditions and individual views. She is fully aware that these bonds are unreasonable and yet she wants to be bound by them as the typical traditional woman. She knows that transgressing them will certainly rupture the family ties. She realises that it would be an act of wisdom to keep the traditional family ties without losing her individuality.

With the realisation that she loves and needs Jayant, she decides to get back to him taking care not to be influenced by him in career matters. She wants to restart her life built on the foundation of honesty and she decides to be her true self in her relationships with Jayant, she doesn't want to be like the one whose feelings are suppressed just to please Jayant. She achieves freedom and does what she thinks she should be doing. She also decides not to share with her husband her affair with the dead Naren as she thinks that this has nothing to do with Jayant. She returns "*home*", to Jayant, now "... *equipped with that quality of courage*" necessary to face the challenge of *identity crisis that her marriage with Jayant had always posed* - returns to suffer, to question and to find roots". (Patil : 136) Commenting on Indu's decision to start writing according to her own wishes and not to use Akka's money to enrich herself, Usha Tambe says, "*The important point is that she is making independent decision.*" (Tambe : 124)

Indu asserts her position as a human being equal to that of a man and does not want to submit herself to anyone's dictates. This is the long and the short of her bitter struggle through conflicting trends between the age-old

traditions and the emerging new ideas. The author seems to have carved out the character of Indu to effectively depict her own reflections on the travails of a modern Indian women passing through the contemporary transitional stage in the evolving social values. Sarabjit Sandhu succinctly summarises this aspect of the matter in the following words:

Deshpande has very exquisitely pinpointed the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian women through the character of Indu who has raised many basic questions regarding modern women who are rooted and shaped by the Indian customs but influenced by the scientific knowledge of the West. (Sandhu : 48)

Indu's acceptance of western values and her search for liberty with a precondition of unfettered growth and maturity of personality, despite the insidious conflict between tradition and modernity ultimately results in her emergence as a human being evolving basically as a woman of determination, not yielding to the dictates of the patriarchal society. S.P. Swain appropriately sums up Indu's growth when he comments thus :

The meek, docile and humble Indu of the early days finally emerges as a bold, challenging, conscious and rebellious woman. She resigns her job, thus defying male authority, hierarchy and the irony of a woman's masked existence. Her self-discovery is the frightening vision of the feminine self's struggle for harmony and sanity... She is able to discover her roots as an independent woman, a daughter, a mother and a commercial writer". (Swain : 95)

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Chapter - 3

The Dark Holds No Terrors

SARU : SHE STEPS OUT TO CONQUER

I was the first to break
the golden chains
of unmixed ease
no puppet
to your fisted strings...

- *Kabitha Sinha*

Falling in line with Indu of **Roots and Shadows** who seeks freedom within the boundaries of obligations and responsibilities, who also conquers her fears and achieves harmony in life, Saritha in **The Dark Holds No Terrors** too, undergoes similar trauma, confronts reality and, at the end, realises that the dark no longer holds any terrors to her. She survives in a male-dominated world which offers no easy outs to women. She neither surrenders to nor escapes from the problems, but with great strength accepts the challenge of her own protege.

Saritha (usually known by the diminutive Saru) is humble and modest, very sensitive but lacking in self-confidence as a middle class woman, she is aware of her own limitation. Yet, she longs to break away from the rigid traditional norms and adopts to be an anti matriarch who yearns for a new environment where the mother cannot thrust her will on her. She hates her parental home and her quest leads her to discover the hidden strength in human being which shapes life to a pleasurable and possible one.

Saru, the "two-in-one woman" is a successful doctor during day time, and a "terrified trapped animal" at night. This traumatic experience necessitates her to crave for freedom from dominerering influences. She wishes to become a free individual and wants to have an identity of her own with a purpose in life. Saru, as she understands the meaning of her name, loves living as a human being. She says : "*My life is my own*".(220) Some how she felt as if she had found it now the connecting link. "*It means you are not just a strutting, grimacing puppet, standing futilely on the stage for a brief while between areas of darkness*".(220)

Saru is presented simultaneously as an individual and as a female. The novel begins with Saru visiting her father after a gap of fifteen years. On hearing through a friend about her mother's death a month ago, Saru wants to visit her father's house from where she had left as a young woman, defying her parents to marry the man Manohar (known by the diminutive Manu, a name no doubt carrying overtones of the legendary patriarchal law-giver who saw the world from a male-centred perspective) whom she loved. She now returned to it as a well-established doctor and a mother of two children more out of an urge to escape from the hell of life she is passing through. She appears to be confused, hopeless, dull, almost thoughtless and a recluse.

She was not apprehensive, though not eager either, for the moment of confrontation. She glanced back at the rickshaw in which she had come. She hadn't paid the man as yet, as if keeping a route open for retreat. (15)

The traditional Hindu woman in her rises up only to disappear too soon. Alienated from her husband, she comes to her parental house to seek her sense of belonging to the world but the same eludes her. Initially, as Saru comes to her father's house, she feels like a 'stranger', as Sudama standing at the gates of the palace of Krishna and Rukmini. She is conscious that she is no 'Sudama' in rags, bare feet and filled with humility. But she gets a cold reception at her father's house. At times Saru even regrets her visit. "*Why had it seemed so important to come here, and, at once?* (17) As Saru stays at her parental house, she gets a chance to review her relationship with her husband, her dead mother, her dead brother, with her own children. Her earliest memories are those which speak about the gender discrimination shown by her mother in favour of her brother Dhruva. Saru has had an insecure childhood. As her sense of reasoning and questioning develops, she feels she is unable to tolerate the preference shown towards her brother. She feels jealous of her brother when he gets all the parental care and attention. She struggles to attract her father's attention and succeeds only to some extent. Saru's mother, who believes a girl to be a liability and a boy an asset, instils a sense of insecurity in her daughter's mind. When, as a child, Saru rarely speaks to her father, Dhruva, her brother, often has long conversations. Her father used to take Dhruva out for a ride. He used to sit on the small seat specially fixed on the bar of the cycle giving rise to the impression that "*daughters are their mother's business*". (105) Saru is always considered a burden to be eased, or a problem to be

solved or a responsibility to be dispensed with. There is always a Puja performed on Dhruva's birthday. His birthdays and other religious rituals related to him are given top priority and celebrated with much pomp while her birthdays are barely acknowledged and this disparity of treatment makes her to think that her birthday is only a matter of displeasure for her mother. Saru laments thus : *"But of my birth, my mother had said to me once... 'It rained heavily the day you were born. It was terrible'. And somehow, it seemed to me that it was my birth that was terrible for her, not the rains"*. (169)

Saru's mother's strong preference for her brother drives her to a sense of restlessness and alienation. The partisan attitude of her parents has a devastating effect on Saru. She becomes rebellious in nature. When her brother dies by drowning in the pond accidentally, she mutely watches the whole scene without rushing to his help. Since then, she is haunted by the thought that she is responsible for his death. Even her mother finds her guilty. She points out, *"You killed your brother"*. (146) Premila Paul attempts to lay bare Saru's mind when she says: *"Dhruva's demise had always been her subconscious desire and there is very thin demarcation between her wish and its fulfilment"*. (Paul : 67)

Life becomes more desperate to Saru after Dhruva's death. There are no celebrations at home, her own much-awaited birthday passes off in silence both at school and at home. Saru's mind is filled with deep and indelible scars as her mother constantly pins for her dead son and rejects even the presence of her daughter. At every given opportunity Saru's mother snubs

her. This sense of rejection by her mother fills the adolescent Saru's mind with feelings of hatred towards her mother as Adesh Pal observes:

For Saru the very word "mother" stands for old traditions and rituals, for her mother sets up a bad model, which distorts her growth as a woman, as a being ... thus the strange childhood experiences false up her inflated ego and her thirst for power over others. (Pal : 74-75)

Saru's hatred gets intensified and as she attains puberty, she resents the onset of her womanhood. *"If you're a woman, I don't want to be one".* (62) Filled with a sense of shame at her monthly ordeal, she resents the traditional practice in her orthodox home when she is treated like a paraiah during those three days. Thus rejection by her mother during the early impressionable years leads to psychological insecurity in Saru. She is prone to constant and recurring dreaming. She begins to express her feelings through the acts of defiance which spring from her resentment against her mother as a young girl, and then as a child. She hated her, she wanted to hurt her, wound her, and make her suffer. Saru gets hurt when her mother says: *"You will never be goodlooking. You are too dark for that".* (61) She hopes for a miracle to happen and that one day she would grow up and be beautiful. But when it actually happens, growing up becomes shameful for Saru. The rigidity of do's and don'ts prescribed by the domineering mother makes her grow more wild and defiant. Later, she goes to Bombay to study Medicine in spite of her mother's opposition. Luckily for her, her father has encouraged her. Saru's mother doesn't understand the importance of girl's education.

But she's a girl... And don't forget, medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding. Can you do both? (144)

Further she thinks that Saru is their responsibility and they can't ever evade that responsibility. Later, when her mother fails to argue with Saru, she becomes hysterical and starts accusing her of her brother's death. '*...She let him drown'... 'she killed him'. (145)* This accusation hurts the tender heart of Saru who keeps on saying:

I didn't. Truly I didn't. It was an accident. I loved him, my little brother. I tried to save him. Truly I tried. But I couldn't. And I ran away. Yes, I ran away, I admit that. But I didn't kill him. (146)

Saru's confrontation with her mother reaches its peak when she decides to marry Manu. Her choice of a boy from a lower caste is a sign of her rejecting the traditional ways and values her orthodox mother adheres to. She recalls the conversation with her mother when she confronts her with her intention of marrying Manu.

What caste is he ?

I don't know

A Brahmin ?

of course not.

*Then, cruelly... his father keeps a cycle shop
"oh, so they are low-caste people, are they?. (96)*

The word her mother has used, with the disgust, hatred and prejudice of centuries so enrages Saru that she replies "*I hope so*". (96) Thus, the little rebel of Yore who used to *resent her mother's gender-bias mutely, becomes overtly defiant ...*" (Bande : 136) After her marriage Saru is hurt to hear from a mutual acquaintance that her mother has said, "*let her know more sorrow than she has given me*". (197) She even thinks at one point that she is 'unhappy and destroyed' in her marital life because her mother has cursed her. But gradually her hostile attitude towards her mother changes to a positive one. She even begins to see her mother as the creative essence of the feminine. She makes efforts to understand her and even identify herself with her mother. Valli Rao finds this as "... *a search for her own feminine side and for the reunification of her split self... and finally we see 'rebirthing' her own individual personality separate from her mother's*". (Rao : 107) Thus, she finally emerges from her ordeal a person more whole, more capable of accepting and forgiving herself than she has been at the start. Saru's entry into Medical College leads to romance with Manu. In the first flush of her infatuation with Manohar, however, Saru considers herself highly privileged to have been chosen by him. She says : "*how could I be anyone's beloved? I was the redundant, the unwanted, an appendage one could do without. It was impossible for anyone to want me, love me, need me*". (66) In her dreams Saru longs for Manu's love. She is crazy about him and his love appears to her protective, condescending, all-encompassing and satisfying. This is no ego-problem and no assertion of identity.

Saru starts fantasizing about Manu. The one-dream that dominates her psyche is the age-old feminine dream of total submission to a conquering male. In her imagination Manu is tender imperious and passionate. Later, it is Saru who revives the acquaintance with him. As they speak with each other, he also becomes interested in her. When Manu expresses his love for her, she feels flattered. She becomes exultant for having evoked feelings in someone who is emotionally hard to be touched.

And that he, a man set apart from the others, above the others... should love me seemed even more incredible. The fisherman's daughter couldn't have been more surprised when the king asked her to marry him, than I was by Manu's love for me. (66)

However, the very thought of marriage unnerves Saru. Perhaps it is the fear of sex, the unknown. Till they get married, Manu and Saru are quite innocent in their relationship. This may be because of their middle-class inhibitions. Marriage opens the sesame of all enjoyment for Saru. After the first moments of apprehensions, there is never anything withholding in her. Saru who has lacked love in her life finds a saviour in Manu. "*I was insatiable, not for sex but for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved, of my being wanted*". (40)

Manu and Saru's marital life becomes quite good. As Manu says '*when we're together, it's heaven...*' (38) To Saru all this seems to be difficult to believe. She feels that all these things could only happen to girls in movies.

Saru, by marrying Manu, has a permanent break in the relationship with her mother. At a point Manu fears that cutting Saru off from her parents will be painful for her. But Saru, on the other hand, feels quite detached from her parents. She explains this in a more scientific manner.

'Have you seen a baby being born? Do you know, Manu, how easy it is to cut the umbilical cord and separate the baby from the mother? Ligate, cut and its done. There's scarcely any bleeding either. It's as if nature knows the child must be detached from the parent. No, Manu, for me there will be no trauma, no bleeding'. (39)

The mother in her turn successfully erases from her mind every trace of Saru and even predicts the fate of Saru's marriage. Thus: "*It's love for a few days, then quarrels all the time*". (69) It is from this moment that Saru takes a vow never to see her parents. Saru is happy with Manu, though they live in her dingy one-room apartment. But soon this happiness turns out to be only an illusion. As long as Saru is a student, Manu has been the bread winner. They have had peace at house despite its filth and stench. But problems begin to slowly creep in the moment Saru is recognised as a doctor. Her economic independence makes Manu feel thoroughly insecure and this casts a shadow on their married life. The seeds of jealousy are sown in him when there is an explosion in a nearby factory. Burnt and mutilated bodies pour in where Saru has to attend on them. After this incident, Saru emerges as a successful and reputed doctor. Almost every morning there is a knock at the door and her visitors demand her medical attention. Saru, young and

quite unused to her profession is thrilled with her new job but Manu's behaviour begins to change. He feels totally ignored as Saru gets all the attention. Saru initially fails to notice this change in Manu but later realises that "*...the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps, the same things that made me inches taller, made him inches shorter.*".

(42) The warmth between them cools off and the harmony is disrupted.

In her new role as a career woman, Saru is no longer happy in their shabby apartment and she prefers to move into something more decent and beautiful. She feels that the flat in which she and Manu have been living all these years is narrow and also Manu's earnings now make her feel that it barely covers her needs.

Her work keeps Saru away from Manu for longer hours and she reaches home late at night for which he sulks. His ego is hurt by her success, he feels inferior and this sense of inferiority makes him brutal in his behaviour. Though he is normal by day, he turns a treacherous rapist at night and tries to assert his masculinity through sexual assaults upon Saru. Her dream of finding happiness in marriage is soon shattered. Now Saru does not share good and cordial relationship with her husband. She scorns the world 'love' and refuses to believe that such a thing can never exist between man and woman. Gradually Saru changes her attitude towards Manu and her marital life. The world around her and her place in her life becomes so insignificant that Manu's position and place in her life becomes relatively unimportant. Saru views sex as a dirty word. With her responsibilities

increasing outside of home, she recoils from Manu's love-making and he takes her rejection of sex as rejection of himself. Saru, however, is unhappy over the situation. She is so desperate that to save her marriage, she is prepared to sacrifice her lucrative profession. Saru gathers up all her courage and tells Manu, "*I want to stop working. I want to give it all up... my practice, the hospital, everything*". (79)

Saru just wants to be his wife so that he doesn't resent her any longer. Though in the beginning, his beastly behaviour and sexual sadism confused her, now she has reached a stage when she is not able to bear it any longer. She can't stand his brutal behaviour and also that she is prepared to sacrifice everything as long as he leaves her alone. But Manu disapproves of Saru's idea of leaving her job. When he asks her to go on with her responsibilities, Saru feels that it is "sheer necessity" that holds them together. She thinks deeply. She finds she has every reason to break away from her marriage of convenience, shorn of genuine love. She says to herself : "*I have to orient myself, I have to be more sure, more certain*". (69) Saru establishes herself as a career-oriented woman and her profession satisfies her ego.

Her predicament is contrary to the assertion of most feminists that financial independence brings security to woman. Saru thinks that it is easier for the women in the past to accept such way of life for they did not have to struggle and therefore had no other choice. There was nothing else for them except to resign themselves to their destiny. But in Saru's case, her way of thinking is conditioned by the age she lives in. What really irritates Saru is

Manu's assumption that marriage gives him a lifelong right for affection, love and respect. Saru has established herself as a successful doctor and earns bread and butter for the family. This state of affairs sets the ball of disunity in their relationship rolling which gradually acquires momentum beyond anyone's control. Saru has initially been a display model to Manu but later, Manu becomes an outright cruel person and starts insulting Saru in a way called "*Monstrous onslaught on her person and personality. He attacked me like an animal that night. I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this ... this man hurting me. With his hands, his teeth, his whole body*". (201)

Manu is a typical traditional husband who always prefers to be at the centre and his wife on the periphery. Saru's friend Vidhya also notices this and mockingly tells Saru when she in her modesty, prefers to sit "... *down among the audience...*" , how Manu envies her growth. She tells Saru "*see that you stay there... or else Manu won't like it*". (156) Saru hates Manu's pretentious attitude. Her understanding is that Manu needs a woman who is subservient and obedient. Silently Saru bears Manu's brutality quietly as though a wall of silence has risen between them. She fears that a stage may be reached when she may be walled alive so that she may die a slow and painful death. She realises that her feelings have had no effect on Manu who is cheerful during day time behaves like a beast during night times. She is unable to put the two men together and unfortunately this dichotomy never ceases. After a conscious effort in evaluating the relative merits of a love marriage and an arranged marriage, she inevitably compromises with her fate for having opted for a love marriage and for which she has herself to blame.

On hearing through her childhood friend, Manda, about her mother's death Saru feels like seeing her father. This desire is aggravated by Manu's behaviour and hence she goes to him after a gap of 15 years. It is from this parental care and security she had walked out once with a vow never to return. Nevertheless, she returns to seek refuge, unable to bear the barbarism of her husband. She expects a lot of sympathy from her father after having become a hapless victim of her senseless choice of a love marriage, she bemoans : "...*It's my fault again. If mine had been an arranged marriage, if I had left it to them to arrange my life, would he have left me like this?*" (218) Saru is aware of the woman's strength in going after arranged marriage. She reminiscences about a friend's sister who, as a result of a disastrous marriage, was surrounded with care and sympathy, as if she was "*an invalid, a convalescent*". (218) As Saru observes, the girl's face carried neither despair nor shame, only a look of passive suffering. "*For the failure had not been hers, but her parents'; and so the guilt had been theirs too, leaving only the suffering for the girl*". (219)

Saru yearns for security and emotional attachment. She wants her father to support her and her feeling raised against Manu's brutality. She even rehearses these thoughts and recites them as if she was reading out a clinical history of an unknown patient. But when the real moment comes she blurts loudly and crudely, "*My husband is a sadist*". (199) Her father fails to understand her vocabulary like sadism, love and cruelty. Painstakingly Saru makes every possible effort to explain to him about her problems and when she speaks to him, it is not as a daughter but as a woman to a man. Saru's

father expects that they should talk like matured persons because he feels that this kind of relationship of intimacy or sharing has never occurred even between him and his wife. He says "*Silence had become a habit for us*". (199) He enquires Saru about the events that have happened and gradually his unnatural composure and indifference have disappeared. Saru eagerly tells him everything about Manu's brutality and expresses her helplessness. She says : "*I couldn't fight back. I couldn't shout or cry, ... I could do nothing. I can never do anything. I just endure*". (201) She expects moral support from her father and she becomes more frantic and requests him. '*But you've got to help me, you've got to. You did it once. And because you did I went to Bombay, met him and married him*'. (204)

On listening to Saru, her father simply leaves her and goes away. Saru lives an isolated and lonely life. She wants her father to listen to her but her father's unchanging attitude saddens her. She thinks that they are like people that "*are fated to be strangers*". (105) Many times she wants to tell her father, "*Baba, I'm unhappy. Help me, Baba, I'm in trouble. Tell me what to do*". (44) But her feelings remain inside her. At times she regrets for having come to her parent's house, as she is reminded of her children, her practice, and her patients. In all these memories her husband doesn't figure at all. Her visit to her father's house is a kind of escape from the sadist husband and her loveless marriage. It's a kind of solace from her hectic daily routine too. Staying with her father and Madhav who makes no demands on her and on her whereabouts is a relief to Saru. The whole day in her parents' house is completely dedicated to her own desires and comforts. She also reminiscenes the kind of life she had lived as a child.

To Saru, the idea of men going to work, children going to school, and women staying at home to work, clean, scrub and sweep appealed as she finds a kind of harmony in these tasks performed by women who stay at home. This kind of contentment as Saru discovers in her new routine life makes her feel that she has a totally new life, and now as Saru calls herself a totally changed person and nothing of the old Saru is left. At her father's place, slowly she loses the awareness of her femininity. She stops thinking about herself as a woman. The doctor in her is more often seen than the wife or mother in her. Neighbourhood women visit her to talk about their ailments. Mostly these women keep everything as a secret. This makes Saru to think that. "... *their very womanhood a source of deep shame to them... she calls them Stupid, silly, martyrs... idiotic heroines. Going on with their tasks, and destroying themselves in the bargain, for nothing but a meaningless modesty*". (107)

Unmeaning heroism taken from a mythical source attracts these women, who later turn to be self-sacrificing and these martyred women irritate Saru. Angrily she questions "*why didn't you do something about it earlier*". (107) She employs all her medical skills as she listsens to them. Though desirous of settling down there at her father's place, she is aware of the practical problems that may creep in. In this connection Saru is reminded of what Betty Friedan said "*It was easier for her to start the women's lib movement than to change her own personal life*". (107)

Saru like her neighbourhood women can never voice her feelings until the real day had arrived. Her heart explodes and she becomes so restless. She

objectively analyses her share in her marriage turning out to be a disaster. Her ruminations make her think: "*My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood*". (217)

After reliving memories of her brother's death when she was a child, Saru is now able to confront deeper problems. She at last receives comfort from her father who advises her to forget about her role in the death incidents of her brother and her mother. He further advises her that she should learn to encounter adversities as they come along in one's life, and she must be prepared to meet the present problem of facing her husband Manu. Earlier the disillusionment in her marital life makes her look for other avenues. Even affairs with Boozie and Padmakar Rao are temporary substitutes for her unfulfilled marital life.

To Saru, Boozie is a handsome and masterful man. Everything about him-right from his language, his swift progress through the hospital wards etc ... appears to Saru, as if he does everything in perfect co-ordination. Later Saru realises that Boozie's interest in Saru is not that of master and student but that of a man and a woman. Though it looks strange to her, she responds fittingly to his flirtatious manner. Very soon their relationship reaches a stage where Boozie helps her with enough money to set up practice in a decent locality. She manages to fulfil her desire of attaining higher education and also better quality of life, which otherwise may not be possible for a common girl like her. Speaking her mind, Saru says:

I told myself my relationship with this man couldn't, wouldn't hurt Manu. It was just a teacher-student relationship. If he put his hand on my shoulder, slapped me on my back, held my hand or hugged me...that was just his mannerism and meant nothing. It had nothing to do with me and Manu. (91)

Saru has contempt for Manu for not questioning her as to why Boozie has given her so much money for opening a new consulting room. She becomes more and more resentful of her husband, who deliberately closes his eyes to Boozie displaying his affection towards her in public, at the inauguration of her consulting room.

"I could feel the stares. Everyone's except Manu's. Who would not look at us. And I should have hated him then ... not Manu, for he had done nothing then for which I could hate him, but this attractive, ravishingly masculine man who was doing this deliberately. Attracting attention to the two of us. But, funnily enough, it was not him I hated. It was Manu for doing nothing. This man... no, I could not hate him, knowing what I did about him. That behind the facade of aggressive, virile masculinity there was nothing at all". (94)

Although Saru's social and financial status grows there's no peace for her at her home. Her feelings on being an economically independent individual are worse. In fact, her economic independence, though asserted by

feminists, brings no fulfilment to her. Another extra-marital relationship of Saru is with Padmakar, often called as Padma. He was her class-mate in Medical College, whom she meets years later as a medical practitioner. Padmakar forces to have more deeper relationship with Saru, but after a few incidents, she dissuades him from doing so as she wants to bring an end to their relationship. This relationship is neither soothing nor comforting to her. She becomes clear eyed with no illusions left about love or romance, says she:

And I? Now, I knew it was not just the consequences I feared and hated, but the thing itself. What had I imagined ? Love ? Romance ? Both, I knew too well, were illusions, and not relevant to my life anyway. And the code word of our age is neither love nor romance, but sex. Fulfilment and happiness came, not through love alone, but sex. And for me sex was now a dirty word. (133)

Commenting on Saru's relationship with the two men, Kamini Dinesh says:

In The Dark Holds No Terror also there are other men but the relationship gives no solace. On the other hand, the homosexual Boozie and the frustrated Padma bring to Saru the disillusioning realisation that there can be no happiness or fulfilment in these relationships. They cannot be an escape route from the tension of married life. The woman seeking a crutch has, finally to fall back on herself. (Kamini : 200)

Saru happens to meet her two childhood friends, Smita and Nalu. While Nalu is a spinster, who teaches at a college, Smita is a housewife. If Nalu moulds herself with an air of dignity and confidence, Smita surrenders herself totally to her husband. Smita has given up her identity, her name is changed as Anju, short for Geetanjali, as her husband is fond of Tagore. Saru also despises Smita for her servile dependence on her husband. When she compares herself to Nalu, she doesn't seem to be happy on being labelled as a woman who is fulfilled just because of her marriage and two children. She says "*But that would be as stupid as calling me fulfilled because I got married and I have borne two children*". (121) Contrasting the joys and sorrows of a wife, a mother and that of a spinster, Saru thinks it is difficult to estimate the value of happiness, and fulfilment among them. Saru has contempt for the traditional concept according to which the sole purpose of a woman's existence is to please her husband. "*Everything in a girl's life...was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male*". (163)

Saru remembers Mai Kaki's advice to keep her hands soft and smooth, so that her, "*husband will never let go of them*". (163) But Saru's husband has let go of her hands because Saru has failed to please him. When invited by two students to speak on the topic, 'Medicine as a profession for women', Saru starts to rehearse an imaginary speech on the relationship that exists between a husband and a wife, and also imagines an old-fashioned couple where the wife walks a few steps behind her husband.

That's important, very important, because it's symbolic of the truth. A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an M.A., you should be a B.A., If he's 5'4" tall, you shouldn't be

more than 5'3" tall. If he's earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees. (137)

In some other connection also, Saru expresses the same opinion:

Don't ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principal- teacher role. It can be traumatic, disastrous. And, I assure you, it isn't worth it.

He'll suffer, you'll suffer and so will the children. Women's magazines will tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership. That's nonsense. Rubbish. No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care that it's unequal in favour of your husband. If the scales tilt in your favour, god help you, both of you. (137)

Saru therefore advocates the feeling that women should pretend that they are smart, competent, rational or strong. Woman can nag, complain, henpeck and moan, but never should show themselves as strong personalities. "Don't struggle, don't swim against the tide. Go along with it; and if you drown nevertheless, well, that's an easier death after all". (137) A woman is expected to behave in accordance with the whims and fancies of her husband. Economic independence and independent identity are not meant for a woman.

Acute confusion prevails upon Saru. She feels that she has done injustice to her mother, husband and children and everybody else. When

Saru goes away to her father's house, she does remember the little needs of the children, like seeing Renu off to school every morning and covering Abhi with a blanket every night. However, these thoughts do not compel her to go back to her house as in the case of R.K.Narayan's Savithri in **The Dark Room**. She takes this opportunity to test, to establish, and to reinforce her indispensability. Saru, it seems, would subordinate all her emotional ties to please her ego.

Sashi Deshpande does not glorify Saru's sufferings. Though she tries to enlist a sufficient amount of sympathy for her protagonist, it is not merely on the grounds of her being a female sufferer. Saru being a realist perceives the ultimate human reality and its process of decay. She finds loneliness as a painful but inescapable human condition. She also understands that the suffering of multitudes does not mitigate one's suffering in any way and that one has to watch patiently the way happiness recedes from one's self. It is this realization that helps her understand her mother's words : "*We are alone. We have to be alone*". (208) Further, the feeling of homelessness drives Saru occasionally to the longing to be released from existence itself. She wonders, "*Would it always be a failure, any attempt to reach out to another human being ? Had she been chasing a chimera all her life, hoping for someone? Perhaps the only truth is that man is born to be cold and lonely and alone*". (219)

However, Saru is not destroyed by her sense of alienation. She is able to think sensibly and logically. Her self-confidence is revealed when she says:

"All right, so I'm alone. But so's everyone else. Human beings...they're going to fail you. But because there's just us, because there's no one else, we have to go on trying. If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk. (220)

Saru understands that despite loneliness, man seeks meaningful life in human interdependence too. The perfect partnership between her father and Madhav is a pattern where they make no demands on each other. It's partnership, wordless, uncomplaining and perfect. A tacit understanding. "As all good partnerships should be" (30) It is ironic that the father whom Saru has always considered a negative man, incapable of strong feelings and who always avoids things, the truths, facts, and life's confrontations is the one who ultimately urges Saru to confront facts. Even the courage to admit to herself that her orbit comprises her children, her home, her practice, her patients and that very definitely her husband 'Manu' brings enormous relief to Saru. At a point, Saru admits "*I have been clinging to the tenuous shadow of a marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated because I have been afraid of proving my mother right*". (220) At the end, Saru's father urges her to confront reality. He tells her that "*she can't run away this way*". (216) He advises her to face the situation.

'Give him a chance, Saru. Stay and meet him. Talk to him. Let him know from you what's wrong. Tell

him all that you told me'... 'Don't turn your back on things again. Turn round and look at them. Meet him'. (216)

Saru's father is very sure about how Saru should behave. He appeals to her not to go away without meeting her husband. Though Saru thinks that Manu is responsible for shattering her dream of happiness in marriage and though she wants to be free from her terrifying loveless trap, she feels guilty of her share in the breaking off of their marriage. She puts off the moment of confrontation, not only with her parents but also with herself. It is Madhav who makes her realise the reality when he says, "*I can't spoil my life because of that boy. It's my life, after all*". (208) Though Saru considers these words to be meaningless, soon she realizes that if a young boy like Madhav can think of his life, why can't she who is a successful doctor, think of herself and her life. Saru now feels that she has to face the situation courageously and it is she who has to decide about herself. Besides, one cannot go back in life, one has to continue on the path of one's own choice wherever it leads: "...*all those ties we cherish as eternal and long-lasting are more ephemeral than a dewdrop*". (208) Saru says that the ultimate reality is one's self, one's own self. She is confused, gets nervous and finds no answer. Gradually, the need for quest arises. Saru laments "... *it's all a question of adjustment, really. If you want to make it work, you can always do it*". (118)

Saru would only think "*I wish ... I had stayed what I was once ... a blindly adoring female*". (135) Now she is also able to identify that her being

aloof started showing its impact on her children, specially the bewildered looks on Renu's face. However, all the events are capable of bringing reawakening slowly yet steadily. Saru thinks "*If only someone would tell her what to do, she would do it at once, without a second thought*". (97)

Saru seems to be tired of comparing the fearful stranger of the night and the rather pathetic Manu of other times "...*hating him yet pitying him too. For he is groping in the dark as much as I am*". (96) Saru appears like Mrs Thompson of Katherine Anne Porter's short novel **Noon Wine**, (Porter : 100) when she wanted to believe in her husband and there were too many times when she couldn't. Thus Saru's father at one point says "... *Are you not sufficient for yourself? It's your life, isn't it*". (217) Saru realizes that she has to accept all these selves-daughter, sister and wife as they are, for she wants to accept these selves to become whole again. But if she is all of them, they are not all for her. Saru understands that integration alone would make her whole again and confrontation of the disintegrating elements would never make that possible. "*Escapism is no solution; a permanent solution has to come from within*". (Seema : 113) You are your own refuge, there is no other refuge. Saru realises, that one has to be sufficient within oneself because there is no other refuge elsewhere and Saru needs to apply to herself what she has cautioned Dhruva once. There is no need to escape from the darkness or curse the darkness.

The dark holds no terrors. That the terrors are inside us all the time. We carry them with us, and

like traitors, they spring out, when we least expect them, to scratch and maul. (85)

Darkness makes one incapable to see things clearly and objectively. Darkness is also a source of constant fear when viewed from outside. It hampers the outlook of the inside, but it holds no terror in itself. The darkness of mind ceases to be terrible the moment one is prepared to face the situation. Saru has begun to understand things as she finds that the dark is not terrible. As realization draws upon her, she becomes aware that neither secluded life nor the "wall of silence" shall be of any help to her. She decides to speak of her being, the individual fragments will not be taken away by anyone, for now she hates to be touched. To Saru, therefore, there is realisation that marriage is no guarantee for happiness. By gaining the identity as a woman, a new Saritha is identified to whom past was always receding and there was no future. Saru now learns to see reality clearly. "*No, I'm a realist. We are realists. We deal with the ultimate reality... the human body. We come into this world alone and go out of it alone*". (208) Saru is in the process of gaining her identity as an individual. She is brave enough to realise that:

Walking along a road, going on and on knowing with a sinking feeling that something, somebody awful and frightening, was waiting for her at the end of it. But it was important to go on just the same, not to stop, even though there was doom waiting for her. (210)

Saru understands that it is she, who is self-assertive and that she has been cruel to her people like her own brother Dhruva, to her mother and her husband, Manu. She feels that till her last breath, she will not be able to get rid of the thought that she was cruel to them. "*The facade of deception had cracked so completely... Shafts of truth pierced her, causing her unbearable pain*". (212) Her realisation is swift and nearly perfect when she thinks "*It's not what he's done to me, but what I've done to him*". (216) She realises that her ego is responsible for all the problems that crept in her life. As A.K.Awasthi observes : "*No atonement can ever redeem her of the feeling of guilt*". (Awasthi : 109) She becomes humble and her father helps her to regain her will-power. From now on Saru feels that it's her life and there is no need to hide oneself from others and be a silent sufferer. This is what she has been desiring till then, and the absence of which has alienated herself from her home, her family and surroundings. Finally, she realises that if all is 'alone' what else is there to fear. By following her father's advice, she has already broken from her past.

Inspired by the roots of Indian culture, Saru realises now that she is no longer a "*guilty sister, undutiful daughter, the unloving wife*". (220) Despite all such awareness and her father's plea of "*don't do it again*" (216) she packs up to take an escape route unsure of where to go. Escape has always been her mode of resolving the tangled knots, exchanging old horrors for new ones. Towards the end of the novel, however, Saru receives a letter about Manu's arrival. Initially, on

hearing about Manu's arrival, she feels "indifferent and thinks ? perhaps Manu might turn away, tired after knocking at the door. That is exactly what she wants. She wants to put herself in another's hands.

At this moment of utter despair, it is the call of her profession that steadies her and gives her the courage to confront reality. Saru sets out to attend Sunita who is sick. The steadied woman in Saru says, "*Baba, if Manu comes, tell him to wait. I'll be back as soon as I can*". (221)

These words stand as a proof of the assertion of her individuality and her willingness to confront reality. Setting out to attend her patient is an indication of Saru's assertion of her career, without any compromise. Albeit it is clear that she will no longer remain as an object for Manu to vent his frustration on. Thus, Saru emerges as a new woman who can control herself and shed her passivity. Describing emancipated women, Maria Mies says:

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'The non-conforming conduct of the women is the consequence of an external necessity but of changed consciousness. They are not satisfied with the rhetoric of equality between man and women, but want to see that the right to an individual life and the right to development of their individual capabilities are realized in their own lives'. (Mies:32)

This is exactly true of Saru who is the representative of middle-class working women in modern India. She rebels against traditions, but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality. This is because, Saru lives in

a transitional society. Saru passes from the illusion to reality, from frustration to submission and as the wheel finally comes round, she makes an ultimate attempt to reconcile herself. Ali through her life, Saru avoids to face the moment of confrontation. There has been no room for open discussion but has waited for the solution to take its own turn. Saru, at the end, is ready to have a life outside the family and face the hard realities of life. A fragment of conversation Shashi Deshpande had with an interviewer may be recalled here:

Interviewer : "Looking for total sustenance only from human relationships seems frustrating. Looking for it outside-in art, in your job seems less so".

*Shashi Deshpande : I agree there. This is the conclusion I've come to myself in
Dark Holds No Terrors. (Viswanatha : 235)*

Saru desires to liberate herself from the shackles of tradition and exercise her right to reveal her individual capabilities and realise her feminine self through identity-assertion and self-affirmation. In the words of S.P.Swain:

Saru's journey is a journey from self-alienation to self identification, from negation to assertion, from diffidence to confidence. She learns to trust her feminine self. (Swain : 39)

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Chapter - 4

That Long Silence

JAYA : SILENT NO MORE

Walk, and arise your fist
Affirm your decision to be free
Don't walk three yards behind
It's your place by right
Mother, Woman!
The Revolution is you.

- *Indira Kulshreshtha*

Jaya, like Indu of **Roots and Shadows** and Saru of **The Dark Holds No Terros**, journeys from ignorance to knowledge through suffering. Going through a process of introspection, self-analysis and self-realisation, she emerges as a confident individual, fully in control of herself, significantly more hopeful and able to accept life just as they do. If Indu is a journalist and Saru, a doctor, Jaya is a successful columnist and an aspiring novelist.

Jaya, to begin with, is a conservative, educated, middle - class "*smiling placid, motherly woman*" (15-16) who learns to suppress her own wishes and act according to her husband's. She who cannot dare to protest, ("*I had learnt it at last no questions, no retorts. Only silence*". 143) has finally unlearned her silence, refuses to be led by nose and affirms with confidence, "*I'm not afraid any more*". (191)

Jaya's husband, Mohan, is an engineer who cares for money, status and material comforts. Working in the purchase section of his office, he prospers well, looks arrogant and brash. Unfortunately, he is caught taking

commission and an enquiry is on. He has to leave his Churchgate bungalow to Jaya's humble Dadar flat. He takes her so much for granted that she is not consulted about shifting. Yet she acquiesces to his decision and follows him. However, Jaya seems to have gained confidence as he begins to lose it being in trouble. When Mohan demands the key, Jaya refuses to hand it over to him. She opens the door herself symbolising her refusal to be servile. She is aware that "*It was not he who had relinquished his authority, it was I who no longer conceded any authority to him*".(9)

Her Dadar flat is in no way comparable to her elegant, well-furnished Churchgate home. Yet, she is perfectly at ease here, relating herself easily to her neighbours and servants. Away from the routine, she is now prepared to look at herself with utmost objectivity and examine her relationship with her husband. Adele King observes, "*Jaya finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is*". (King : 97) Emulating Mohan's mother and sister, she tries to adjust and compromise with her lot though every compromise shatters her individuality. She surrenders herself so totally that she is afraid of expressing her likes and dislikes. Now she is a stereotyped housewife who is "*nervous, incompetent, needing male help and support*".(76)

Outwardly she is a satisfied housewife married to an apparently caring man, with a comfortable home, with no dearth of material comfort. But on scrutiny, it is revealed that to achieve this stage of fulfilment as a wife, Jaya has systematically suppressed every aspect of her personality that

refuses to fit in with her image as a wife and mother besides a failed writer.

As Suman Ahuja observes:

Jaya caught in an emotional, eddy, endeavours to come to terms with her protean roles, while trying, albeit in vain, to rediscover her true self, which is but an ephemera .. an unfulfilled wife, a disappointed mother and failed writer. (Ahuja : 2)

Ruminating on the past, Jaya sees how her marriage has reduced her to a mere automaton. She realises how she wasted away the most valuable time of her life in arranging and re-arranging things, dusting, polishing, washing, ironing, cleaning the fridge and changing the sheets. She is bewildered to find in her diaries that she had spent her life engrossed in such trivialities as what she bought, how much she paid for it, the dates the children's schools had begun, the servants' absence, the advance they had taken, etc.

Jaya, as a girl, was taught by her father to have confidence in herself. He named her Jaya which stands for Victory and has encouraged her to be resilient and courageous. He has made her feel that she is someone special, and someone different from the other girls who would normally end up becoming housewives. He would dream that Jaya either bags an international award or goes to Oxford. However, his untimely death shatters her dreams and makes her to face the reality that she is after all like any other middle class girl destined to be a wife and a mother. As a child she was chided by

her grand mother for asking too many questions and was told that no husband could be comfortable with a woman who asked questions and retorts. It is ironical that although Jaya now has no question or retorts for Mohan, there is no comfortable relationship. Her early training at home has made her obedient and submissive towards her husband. Her relatives taught her the importance of being with a husband.

'a husband is like a sheltering tree. And it was as if she had said 'mau', 'mau' to me. I ignored her. After so many years, the words came back to me. A sheltering tree. Without the tree, you're dangerously unprotected and vulnerable. (32)

And Jaya proceeds to "*keep the tree alive and flourishing even if you have to water it with deceit and lies*". (32) Jaya, since her childhood, has designed her life according to her family members' desires. She marries Mohan not out of choice but out of convenience. He is from same caste, decent, good looking and has a good job. Jaya has no reason to reject him. She says : "*And, if there had been no reason why I should have married Mohan, there had been no reason not to marry him either* ". (93) As a girl Jaya is not very practical and she romanticises love. But when she grows up into a young woman, circumstances make her look at marriage practically, not romantically.

Generally, a woman's identity is defined in terms of her relationship with man as a daughter, a wife and a mother. It means virtually a woman

doesn't have an identity of her own. In keeping with the ritual of re-naming the bride on the wedding day as in some Brahmin communities, Jaya also has been renamed as 'Suhasini' by Mohan. "Suhasini" means a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman, who makes herself loving and also lovingly nurtures her family. With this new name, it appears, that the light-spirited and courageous Jaya has been reduced to a mere proud housewife and mother. Jaya wants to retain her own name given by her father, meaning victory. Her refusal to adopt the name 'Suhasini' becomes manifestation of resistance to the stereotyping that is inflicted on every woman in the Indian society. However, Jaya's rejection of the name 'Suhasini' now remains as a token of victory as she cannot afford to insist on for long as she has been taught to regard her husband as a tree of projection and so represses her anger and resentment.

Jaya has abundant resources within to become a good writer. In the words of Vimala Rama Rao :

"Jaya is one of the rare narrative voices in Indian English fiction who poses and displays a literary sensibility commensurate with her fictional role as a writer telling her own story, one whose college education and reading habits are in evidence in her speaking voice. This indeed is an achievement"
(Rao : 76-77)

In the early years of her marriage, Jaya has been on the threshold of acquiring name as a creative writer of some merit. It is Mohan who has been encouraging her to write. In fact, he introduces her to editors of various papers and magazines. On Mohan's advice, she begins writing middles, "*light humorous pieces about the travails of a middle - class housewife.*" (148-149) these mere skimmings over life do not give her any satisfaction. She is an intense thinking woman longing to confront life through her fiction. She has made a good beginning with a story about a man "*...who could not reach out to his wife except through her body.*" (144) This story has won a prize for its realistic portrayal of life. Yet Mohan assumes that the story portrays their own personal life. He is very apprehensive that people of his acquaintance may assume that he is the kind of person portrayed in the story. But Jaya knows that there is no truth in his accusation, still she does not try to reason with Mohan, as she does not like to risk her relation with him. Jaya says:

Perhaps, if Mohan had been angry, if he had shouted and raged at me, if he had forbidden me to write, perhaps I would have fought him and gone on. But he had only shown me his hurt. And I had not been able to counter that. I had relinquished them instead, all those stories that had been taking shape in me because I had been scared - scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had, my marriage. (144)

Yet her writing lacks the intensity of expression which troubles Jaya. Kamat, her neighbour on the first floor, comes to her rescue. He analyses her stories objectively and tells her how she could make them "*more forceful and hitting*". (148) Kamat also tells her that she has been feeding on wrong sentimental notion, "*women are the victims*"... (148) He rebuilds her morale and suggests her to send her writings to women's magazines. Kamat who is a hard critic knows well that Jaya is capable of giving greater credence to the roles as wives, mothers and aunts and says:

I never can imagine you writing this. This you, I mean. I can see the woman who writes this ...', he'd narrowed his eyes as if focusing on some vision, 'she's plump, good humoured, pea brained but shrewd, devious, skimming over life...'(149)

Jaya is unhappy that the writer in her could not come to light in the estimation of Mohan to whom she "... *had been no writer, only an exhibitionist*" (144). She, however does not stop writing. But she writes the kind of stuff which pleased the publisher and made her husband feel proud of her as a writer, but she herself has fallen like an imposter. She writes a column for a woman's magazine where a character called 'Seetha' says and does things in which Jaya does not believe herself.

That column, yes, it had made me known. My profile silhouetted in stark black that accompanied each article frightened me each time I saw it. It was

like seeing some one masquerading as myself, or as if I was masquerading as the woman who wrote that column. (119)

Jaya, suppressed at every stage of her life, compromises to conform to the role of an ideal Indian woman. In order to become an ideal wife, she has to snip off the bits of her that had refused to be Mohan's wife. As a result, she has been masquerading not only as the writer of 'Seetha' but also as 'Suhasini'.

Jaya smothers her despair at being forced to live a life of deception. She feels that she will 'break down', that she can't go on, and 'can't cope' but does not give expression to these feelings because of her fears-her fear of hurting Mohan and jeopardizing her marriage, her fear of destroying the veneer of the happy family she tries to project and her fear of failing as a writer. In the Indian context, marriage is absolutely a sacrosanct contract and the images of the devoted wife and husband conforming to the concept of 'ardhanarishwara' have been held up as the imminent reality of the relation between the sexes. Discussing gender, Catherine Stimpson says:

Cultural laws of gender demand that feminine and masculine must play off against each other in the great drama of binary opposition. They must struggle against each other, or complement each other, or collapse into each other in the momentary, illusory relief of the androgynous embrace. In patriarchal cultures, the struggle must end in the

victory of the masculine; complementality must arrange itself hierarchically: androgyny must be a mythic fiction. (Stimpson:1)

Jaya, more or less, feels in the same way when she says:

Man and woman - it was then that I realised the deep chasm between the two. They are separated for ever, never more than at the moment of total physical togetherness. (98)

Marriages in India "... never end, they cannot - they are a state of being". (127) This is mainly because of the necessity of conforming to cultural edicts. As a result, marriage seldom corresponds to the personal experience or aspirations of the individuals involved so that the relationship is often like Jaya's description of her own marriage. "*Ours has been a delicately balanced relationship, so much so that we have even snipped off bits of ourselves to keep the scales on an even keel*". (7)

In spite of her flippant attitude towards Vanitamami and her advice, later in the course of the novel, Jaya proves that she is no different from her. Jaya resembles Indu and Saru in having subdued her independent spirit to the desires of her husband. Just as Indu, who obeys her husband's wishes and fancies, and like Saru, who thinks that a wife must be a few feet behind her husband's, Jaya also bows to the male superiority. Sometimes, Jaya appears to be not very different from other women - Nayana, who despises

her drunkard husband but craves for a son; Mukta, the widow who fasts; Mohan's mother, who suffers her husband's humiliations silently and Jeeja, who thinks that a woman without her kumkum on the forehead is nothing. When the choice of selection comes between her husband and family, unhesitatingly Jaya chooses to be with her husband, however assertive and independent individual she may be. She holds on to her marriage and sees Mohan and herself as a pair of bullocks yoked together. In her own description, her married life is:

A pair of bullocks yoked together ... a clever phrase, but can it substitute for the reality ? A man and a woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children. A family somewhat preserved like the one caught and preserved for posterity by the advertising visuals I so loved. But the reality was only this; We were two persons. A man ... A woman. (8)

The image of the pair of bullocks yoked together suggests that yoked bullocks should share the burden between themselves, but no one knows whether they love each other or not. The image of the beasts performing their assigned duties mechanically undermines the relationship of husband and wife, who are united in marriage for love, but not for leading a mechanical life which results in ending up in mutual hatred and distrust.

The loveless married life which causes the wife and the husband to drift away from each other results in total failure. By implication, the

character of Jaya represents modern woman's ambivalent attitude to married life. It is only by negating her own personality that a woman, who is powerless in the patriarchal order, can survive. Jaya in order to maintain the facade of her marriage as a happy one, slowly transforms herself to this ideal of womanhood, where she learns to repress her anger. Jaya always works up to please her husband. Jaya even transforms her appearance to suit his idea of a modern woman - cuts her hair and wears dark glasses. She ultimately gets so completely absorbed into the family fold that from a fiercely independent woman, she is transformed into the stereotype of a woman. Jaya desperately clings to her husband as if her life depends on him. At times, she is beset with the fear that something may happen to Mohan and Jaya feels:

The thought of living without him had twisted my insides. His death had seemed to me the final catastrophe. The very idea of his dying had made me feel so bereft that tears had flowed effortlessly down my cheeks. If he had been a little late coming home, I had been sure he was dead. By the time he returned, I had, in my imagination, shaped my life to a desolate widowhood. (96-97)

Jaya's story, in the larger context, is the story of generations of women. She accepts the reality of the situation and her existence in relation to her family. Jaya has no necessity nor has she a wish to look outside, she wants

to be safe looking after her husband and children. The outside world has, so far not, affected her life, though at times she feels dissatisfied with her life.

Jaya, in search of an individual identity, turns back ruthlessly on Kusum, and she fails to show understanding and has not maintained any human relationship with Kamat in the hour of the need. Further, Jaya realises that this reaching out beyond the self is not a deviation from womanliness but a means of fulfilment, to find her identity as an individual. Jaya learns to reorder the relationship with her parental family, her husband, children and dependents. The memories of the past modify her expectations about the present.

Mayamma in Gita Hariharan's **The Thousand Faces of Night** is a battered wife and mother, who has suffered at the hands of her domineering mother-in-law and animal-like husband. But she continues to sacrifice and lives a tortured and humiliating life because she has no option, no way out but bleeding within, seeking solace in the routine of life and religious worship. Even educated women like Devi in **Seven Faces of Night** have hardships to face like Jaya. Devi is filled with fury as she is expected to swallow her hard-earned education and follow her husband's "self contained foot-prints". Mukta, the protagonist of Sunita Jain's **A Girl of Her Age**, realises the limitations of choice, specially that are prevalent in the Indian family system. Women like Mukta are either victims of evil-ridden society of ignorance or of noble ideas of sacrifice and stoic suffering for their husbands and children.

The old woman in Mulk Raj Anand's **The Old Woman and the Cow** is condemned for being shrewd, selfish and sexy, whereas her daughter is praised for her willingness to take pains to win her husband's suspicious love, secure his pardon and accept her destiny to be the subservient partner in her married life. Similar is the value system of Bhabani Bhattacharya's heroine in **Music for Mohini**. Like Jaya, Mohini too is a modern girl possessing a wonderful voice and sings for the All India Radio. In the beginning, her music is taped in records and her portrait is published in papers and magazines initially, her music flowed as spontaneous joy, it sounded as the triumph of her youth. But later, her talent is side tracked due to her marriage. Her husband is an admirer of ancient traditions and customs of the Brahmins and this talented young singer becomes only a patient and subservient wife, who gives up singing, obeys her husband and mother-in-law and looks after the affairs of the house. Though there is a discordant note in her, as she becomes a mother, personal interest and desire for music slowly subside as she sees meaning of life in bringing joy to her husband and mother-in-law. Mohini, the singer, gradually disappears and in her place Mohani, the mother or wife emerges with selflessness, patience and compromise to tradition as goals in life.

The relationship between a wife and husband is expected to be not only cordial but intimate and enduring. But this relation between Jaya and Mohan is an epitome of failure and an emblem of disgust, disappointment and depression. This is so because there was no love between them. This disgust

of living with a man who does not love the woman the way she expects him to, is a burning problem the educated woman has to face in the contemporary society. Marriage in India means marrying the husband's family traditions. The psychological and social realities in which women live have remained virtually unchanged.

Like Saru **The Dark Holds No Terrors**, who scorns the word 'love' and says, "*there was no such thing between man and woman*" (TDHNT : 65), Jaya too thinks that real emotional involvement is unlikely between a man and a woman. Her blunt confession is "*Love? No, I know nothing of it*" (153). Like Saru, Jaya also is a romantic to begin with, but later she is so disenchanted that she gives up her efforts to please Mohan and look attractive for him. She is so disgusted with their mechanical relationship that she describes it as "a man and a woman married for seventeen years without mutual love or understanding".

This lovelessness in her marriage draws Jaya towards Kamat, a middle-aged lonely intellectual who is not rich or socially significant as Mohan. But he is warm, friendly and companionable. He treats Jaya as an equal and Jaya is completely at ease in his company, sharing with him things which she cannot tell others including Mohan. Her physical intimacy with Kamat is characterised by a spontaneity and ease, but more important in their relationship is perfect mutual understanding and friendship between them. That is why his sudden death is a great blow to her.

For Indian women marriage and motherhood are considered mandatory for fulfilment and happiness. One of the primary tests of gender differentiation is the dominance of a man over his wife, the superiority of the male over female and every woman is to endorse this ethics in her relationships with man. Jaya is the representative of this unequal status of women in our society. In the words of Tapan Basu, "... *Jaya who has input, a life time in surrender of her will to social mores and customs that had relegated women to a second class status*". (Basu:98)

The introspective and inward-probing Jaya represents girls brought up in middle-class families in the post-Independent India. Parents in this class inculcate in their girls a certain duality, sometimes unconsciously: on the one hand an impulsive desire to be emancipated and liberated, and on the other hand, an almost instinctive urge to be traditional and conservative . Shakuntala Bharvani aptly comments thus :

The women of today, therefore, speaking in the language of psychology, has a near schizophrenic personality; One side steadily "accepts" while the other craves to speak, to think and express the life of the mind. (Sakuntala Bharvani : 150)

Jaya is caught in this dilemma, firstly trying to be a suitable wife to her husband and secondly, struggling to express the emotions of women's experience, but seldom expressing them in a male-dominated, chauvinistic society. Desphande herself admits this kind of dilemma when she says "....

this kind of emotions we know women have but never come out". Jaya knows that their relationship is spoiled by incompatibility and lack of communication. If she suffers, it is in silence, if she revolts, it is also in silence. She suppresses her feelings lest they should spoil her relationship with her husband.

One of the most structured patterns of Indian society is the roles assigned to man and to woman - woman is the follower, man the leader. Woman is the sufferer, man the ordainer. Woman is of the home, man of the world. Deshpande describes it thus "*Sita following her husband into exile. Savithri digging Death to reclaim her husband. Draupadi stoically sharing her husbands' travails...*"(11) If it is so, as Dr. K.Madhavi Menon observes : "*When woman asserts her right to take a different path and ceases to be the silent sufferer, there is hostility*". (Menon - 33) As it happens in the case of Jaya who reflects:

No, what have I to do with these mythical women?

I can't fool myself. The truth is simpler.Two bullocks yoked together.... it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful: and what animal would voluntarily choose pain ? (11-12)

The soft and cosy shell of matrimony which most Indian women snugly fit into can break any day and leave the couple exposed as prey to horror and

trauma. Mohan, takes it for granted that Jaya is going to follow his decision. When he gets involved in malpractice, he makes his wife and children responsible for it, that he cares for them so much that he goes out of his way to get the things done. Though Mohan explains to assure Jaya's company with him, he never looks into her demands and neither does she communicate anything directly to Mohan and hence, there always remains a gap between husband and wife and silence prevails in the house.

Jaya has her first and the only outburst with Mohan soon after her marriage. But then she was fresh from the "Jaya for victory" past. As Jaya is a newly married bride, she is also new to the accepted mores of married life. Jaya learns to be silent, she keeps her grousing to herself, stays withdrawn under the shell of silence. Mohan, steeped in the norms he had learnt in his own family says to Jaya, *"My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her".* (83) Jaya feels hurt and becomes angry at the accusations Mohan flings at her during a quarrel, but she is struck dumb:

I was full of a sense of angry confusion. What was he charging me with ? And, Oh God, why couldn't I speak ? Why couldn't I say something ? I felt foolishly inadequate, having nothing to offer him in exchange for all the charges he was pouring on to me. (119)

Jaya had already killed Suhasini. When unable to bear Mohan's angry accusations, she breaks her silence to retort back. Unable to restrain herself, she points out bluntly that she has given up writing because of him. The altercation between them reaches to a stage where Jaya for the first time in her seventeen years of marriage, experiences real anger which robs her of words.

*But as if I'd been struck dumb, I could say nothing.
I sat in my place, pinned to it by his anger, a
monstrously huge spear that went through me,
excruciatingly painful, yet leaving me cruelly
conscious. (121)*

When silence fails as a protective cover, hysteria becomes the only shield. Jaya says, "*I must not laugh, I must not laugh*". (122) Jaya keeps telling herself, considering the gravity of the situation. She knows about Mohan's involvement in a case of bribery and the fears of prosecution, loss of job and societal disgrace on Mohan's part. In fact, she does laugh at Mohan and finally lands herself in a more hopeless situation. "*Laughter burst out of me, spilled over, and Mohan stared at me in horror as I rocked helplessly. When finally I recovered myself I was alone in the room*". (122)

Mohan leaves home without a word after she uncontrollably laughs at him. She bursts out into a hysterical laughter which upsets Mohan so much that he leaves the Dadar flat without a word. Jaya understands Mohan's agony. He is agonised to see Jaya in place of Suhasini:

Mohan's eyes, as he spoke of her, were agonised, the eyes of a man who'd lost a dear one. Suhasini was dead, yes, that was the it, she was one Mohan was mourning, she'd walked into the sea at last. No, the fact was that I'd finally done it. I'd killed her. No, that was not right, either, we had killed her between us, Mohan and I. (121)

His absence unnerves Jaya and she thinks she would fall apart. She begins to vegetate. When Mohan is no longer around, Jaya realizes that she has no face to show to the world in the absence of her husband. It is he who provides comforts and gives meaning to her life. Further, Jaya feels that she is secure only in the care of Mohan, his absence and walk out makes her wade through the waters of uncertainty, she becomes rudderless and others are no substitute.

Disappointed and frustrated the way Mohan left her, she goes out of the house and walks aimlessly in the streets and alleys of Bombay, because she cannot go on with the crushing burden of her marriage thrust on her. Hopelessness and despair thicken further with the disappearance of Rahul who has gone with Rupa and Ashok, their family friends on a holiday trip. The most trying moment comes to Jaya in her life when she finds two male accomplices fondling the breasts of a narcotic-smoking well-to-do girl at the bus stop. Extremely shocked by the behaviour of the two men, Jaya begins to doubt the credibility of her romantic ideas about the woman being the victim. All her revolutionary ideas sag as she fails to combat her first encounter with reality. She realises that the fact of her own children being

distanced from her together with her husband's accusation of having let him down are sufficient to shake her revolutionary ideas. The narcotic-smoking girl's contemptuous attitude shears her of all her self-assumed importance of a "*glass -house existence*". She realizes that she is secure only with Mohan.

For Kamala Markandeya's women, resolution always comes on reconciliation with society, while for Anita Desai's women, it is submission to a more or less malignant fate. In the case of Shashi Deshpande's women, however, there is triumph after a long silence. When Jaya laughs hysterically at the absurdity of marriage right in front of her husband while he is expressing his perplexity at her lack of concern, she appears to be echoing a mad woman's laughter. She thinks : "*Am I going crazy...*(125) She is not a woman who revolts openly in the beginning and later reconciles to the situation, but a kind of woman who wants to revolt, but ultimately does not. Her inner conflict and turmoil are so bitter that she is unable to speak them out and remains silent in order not to be frustrated and disappointed after disapproval of her action by the society.

She feels that she should bear the responsibility for Mohan's shady business practices since she shares his desire for greater wealth. Saru in **The Dark Holds No Terrors** interestingly also has the same feelings because she earns most of the money in her household, but feels guilty of undermining her husband's self confidence because of her position and income. Jaya moves to accept mutual responsibility in marriage. Painfully, she realises that she has tried to make Mohan the scapegoat for her failure

as a writer and blames her parents too like "glowering teenager. (153) She considers her husband to be a "sheltering tree" and by doing so, she tends to underrate her responsibility.

For Jane Austen's women, rules of behaviour are so clear that a single inconsiderate sentence becomes a watershed which causes a moral change in **Emma**. In George Eliot's **Middlemarch**, Mrs. Bulstrode knows that her husband has done wrong but she will have to stand by him. Jyothi in **A Joint Venture** decides to go away to Mahabaleshwar to consider whether she can any longer live with the business man husband's life style package which, apparently, she has to accept in its entirety or not at all. So also Jaya in **That Long Silence** knows that her husband had cheated, but cannot leave him just for that. When Jaya finally comes out of her emotional upheaval, she has sorted out a few problems with herself. She at one point feels that she hasn't achieved anything in her life but soon even this feeling of desperation goes when she reflects :

What have I achieved by this writing? The thought occurs to me again as I look at the neat pile of papers. Well, I've achieved this I'm not afraid any more. The panic has gone. I'm Mohan's wife, I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan's wife. Now I know that kind of a fragmentation is not possible. (191)

Further, Jaya's realisation prompts her to say :

While studying Sanskrit drama, I'd learnt with a sense of outrage that its rigid rules did not permit women characters to speak Sanskrit. They had to use prakrit - a language that had sounded to my ears like a baby's lisp. The anger I'd felt then comes back to me when I realise what I've been doing all these years. I have been speaking prakrit myself.
(192-93)

Though brought up as a unique personality, at this stage in her life, she does not wish to belong to this special category. Mohan's going away stuns her and awakens her to her real place in life. Life for her is believed fully in relationship with others. Not like Anita Desai's Monisha in **Voices in the city**, who never wishes to be related to persons or things, who is afraid of love, of relatedness, and thereby of losing her identity. Jaya feels that she can have her identity only if she has Mohan with her. She journeys a full circle, from searching for her identity in loneliness to her relationship with Mohan and her children. But though it is a full circle, it is not the same point to which she returns. Having realised her position, now she rejects even the image of two bullocks yoked together signalling a loveless couple. Now she has belief in herself- she can choose now. The intense searching of the self has brought knowledge of life which cannot be lived in a vacuum. Jaya does not look at herself and Mohan as two bullocks yoked together in marriage. Instead she looks at herself and Mohan as two individuals with independent minds. "*Two bullocks yoked together -that was how I saw the two*

of us the day we came here, Mohan and I. Now I reject that image. It's wrong. If I think of us in that way, I condemn myself to a lifetime of disbelief in ourselves (191). She realizes that the fault is her own. In the **Bhagwad Geeta**, Krishna imparts knowledge to Arjuna, by uttering "Yathecchasi tatha kuru" (192) (*'Do as you desire' I have given you knowledge. Now you make the choice.*) It is for Arjuna to make the choice. So also it is Jaya who has to give up the language prakrit. For her, it is not "women are victims", but it is "women also can assert and change themselves". Further, Jaya realises that one cannot remain static throughout one's life. One must change and hope for the men also to change.

"... it's possible that we may change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this : Life has always to be made possible. (193)

A change is discernible in Jaya, a change in the right direction and at the right time. The earlier impulsive Jaya becomes a mature woman. With the "All well" news from "Mohan and the arrival of their son Rahul, she finds herself slipping into her marital life again. Feelings of Jaya evolve, one by one, to strengthen her feeling of looking back her way to her home.

Mohan will be back 'All well' his telegram says. Does he mean by this that we will go back to being 'as we were'? Does it mean that, now that Mohan has sorted out his problem, and no longer fears

prosecution, joblessness and disgrace, we can go back to our original positions? Does it mean that he will come back and give me a carefully edited version of what has happened-as he has done so often till now-and then ask me, 'What do you say, Jaya?' (192)

Now Jaya will not say what he wants her to say. As Indira Bhatt puts it, *She seeks "a reorientation of her relationship and also Mohan's new awareness of his relationship to her". (Bhatt : 161)*

From the safety of the "toy-boat in a bath existence" Jaya emerges through the tension of the two worlds in her as a determined strong - willed modern woman, who is prepared to face life, accept her responsibilities squarely and not escape from or avoid them. During the process of her articulation, Jaya also observes that meaningful co-existence can come only through understanding, respect and compassion, not through domination or subjugation. Choice is the right of both man and woman. The only thing to remember is that choice is relevant only when there is knowledge. In the same way, freedom is relevant only when there is responsibility - responsibility to oneself (to one's creative needs). Freedom is to survive 'whole' within the system, and Jaya ultimately feels it is possible. Usha Tambe remarks:

The confused and clumsy Jaya appears a contrast to the smiling, efficient housewife Suhasini. But finally she comes to grips with herself and realises

that her total personality will have to co-ordinate both of them and that fragmentation of self is not possible". (Tambe : 127)

Jaya makes a powerful statement on the totally unfair system prevailing in our society of the subjugation of women. As she realises, it is fear on the part of woman that has allowed the subjugation to continue. Women need not succumb and assume the roles cast upon them. She says, "... *in this life itself there are so many cross roads, so many choices*". (192) Women have allowed victimisation instead of bargaining for partnership. This prompts Sarala Parker to remark that:

The important insight that Shashi Deshpande imparts to us through Jaya is that women should accept their own responsibility for what they are, see how much they have contributed to their victimisation instead of putting the blame on everybody except themselves. (Parkar : 169)

Jaya understands that she also has contributed to her victimisation and that she had to fight her own battle and work out her own solution. Accordingly she feels the necessity to break the silence, articulate her predicament, establish her identity. She knows that there is always room for discussion and compromise. It is not the fault of men alone that has caused the feminine discontent. A patriarchal order can be subverted if only women take their ranks in the order of intelligence and individuality. Jaya shows, as P. Ramamoorthi affirms, that, "... *It is possible for a woman to live in the world where men also live*" (Ramamoorthi:38). She decides that she will live

from now onwards without sacrificing her identity or individuality. She will make adjustment but it will not be a servile one. Her giving up writing for the newspaper column 'Seeta' symbolises giving up her traditional role-model of wife, now she will write what she wants to write and will not lookup at Mohan's face for an answer she wants. This makes her voyage of discovery complete. Very appropriately Sumitra Kukreti remarks thus:

*"The realization that she can have her own way -
yathecchasi tatha kuru - gives a new confidence to
Jaya. This is her emancipation". (Kukreti : 197)*

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Chapter - 5

The Binding Vine

URMILA : THE CRUSADER

Come, my brothers, come, my sisters
let us join our hands,
a new road, a new way
a new age begins.....

— *The Binding Vine*

The long silence that had become the hallmark of woman's existence is broken by Urmila, the protagonist of *The Binding Vine*. The earlier women protagonists of Shashi Deshpande have already begun to question their roles, functions, attitudes and even behaviours. They have realized that they have to unshackle themselves from the chains of bondages which have chained these women's rights for centuries. They are aware that the age-old societal norms and their preordained roles have subjected them to severe suffocation and humiliation. They finally succeed in knowing about themselves but only within the limited perview of their own lives. In a way these women have no interest to raise their feelings as modern feminists do with the capacity to purge society of its evils and blaze forth in a trail of glory.

Urmila of *The Binding Vine* is one who is ahead of her predecessors by her endeavours to help other women. Often referred to as Urmi, she is an upper middle class career woman. She is also a grieving mother who has recently lost her one year-old baby daughter, Anu, and consequently has become highly sensitive to the suffering and despair of others. It is this sensitivity which leads her to befriend the helpless Shakutai, whose daughter

Kalpana lies in comatose state in a hospital after being brutally raped. The mutual support and sympathy between Urmila and Shakutai in coming to terms with each other's grief is remarkable. Normally Urmila's meeting with Shakutai would not have happened as Shakutai belongs to a different strata of society. It is the same sensitivity which also makes her delve into the poems of Mira, her long-dead mother-in-law and understand the mind of the young Mira who is subjected to rape in her marriage. In spite of the best efforts made by her friend cum sister-in-law Vanaa, Amrut and Inni, her own mother, to bring grieving Urmila back to normal life, Urmila seems to be taking her own time to cope with the untimely loss of her daughter. Vanaa's sincere attempts to revive her courage become futile. Urmila turns away from the solicitous care of her mother and Vanaa prefers her to cope with her grief all by herself.

Commenting on Urmila's attitude, S. Indira writes:

Instead of fighting her pain and sorrow she holds, on to it as she believes that to let go of that pain, to let it become a thing of the past would be a betrayal and would make her lose Anu completely. Like a masochist, she clings to her pain and allows her memories of Anu, every small incident to flood her with longing and a great sense of loss. (Indira : 22)

Mira's poems and diaries engage her attention. Through her diaries Urmila establishes a communion with her and tries to reconstruct the tragic tale of a sprightly girl, who suffered and wrote poems "... in the solitude of an unhappy marriage, who died giving birth to her son at twenty two". (48) Through her poems, Mira becomes a symbol of female oppression. While

reading Mira's poems, jotted in her diaries which are none but her school note books, Urmila senses a message being deciphered like a "message tapped on the wall by the prisoner in the next cell". Urmila understands that Mira was a favourite daughter of her father who was obviously proud of her intelligence and talent which made him present Mira a book of poetry. Urmila also understands that Mira had a deep desire of being recognised as a good creative writer and a poet, but for her fear of being laughed at, if she expressed it aloud. Her questioning, anxiety and uncertainty are all felt in her heart, and her poems are the true reflections of her latent feelings.

*Huddled in my cocoon, a somnolent silkworm
Will I emerge a beauteous being?
Or will I, suffocating, cease to exist ? (65)*

Mira's writing reflects the extent of forced sexual activity Mira was subjected to rape in her marriage. Perhaps her situation reflects the mute suffering of many such unfortunate women. Rape has always been a horrible indignity heaped on women-folk by the male species, merely on the strength of brute force. In the words of Adrienne Rich, *it is not rape of the body alone but, rape of the mind as well*'. (Rich : 61) Mira dies in child birth after four years of loveless marriage. Every day and every moment that she spends, there is a cry of rape and anguish. These feelings "runs all through all her writing-a strong, clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married". (63) To her sex becomes "*the sting of scorpion to be borne by women*". (Lakshmi : 6) In one of her poems, Mira laments:

*But tell me, friend, did Laxmi too
twist brocade tassels round her fingers*

*and tremble, fearing the coming
of the dark-clouded, engulfing night? (66)*

Urmila understands that Mira's marriage is only a 'black clouded', haunted night she awaits with dread. She begins to hate the word "love" as it is uttered always by her husband. To her, love becomes a hateful thing and all that she desires is to be left alone. As Urmila narrates a passage from the papers found in Mira's old trunk. They speak about the relationship she shared with her husband and her feelings towards her husband are almost void. *"I don't mind his anger, it makes him leave me to myself, it is bliss when he does that... why can't he leave me alone?" (67)*

Utterly lonely, Mira lives in that alien house whose inmates treat her as a mad woman. The anguish in Mira thus gushes forth.

*They called me mad they, who cocooned themselves
in bristly blankets and thought themselves warm
when I spoke of my soul that boiled and seethed.
(99-100)*

Like Jaya (TLS), Mira too resents the new name given to her at the time of marriage. Her protest is vehement when she bursts out:

*"Nirmala, they call, I stand statue - still. Do you
build the new without razing the old? A tablet of
rice, a pencil of gold can they make me Nirmala? I
am Mira. (101)*

Urmila is confident that she understands Mira, her plight, her suffering and every flicker of her emotion. She confesses :

I've worked hard at knowing Mira, I've read her diaries, gone through her papers, absorbed her poems, painfully, laboriously translated them into English. And now, I tell myself, I know Mira. (174)

Urmila understands that even as a child Mira has hated the way her mother has been surrendering herself to her husband. She opposes every inch of her mother's advice, who says, "*never utter a no; submit and your life will be a paradise.* (83) Urmila knows that the life which seems terrible to Mira is normal to most women of her time. But Mira is not an ordinary woman. Urmila wonders how Mira could survive a life denied of choices and freedom and living with a man whom she could not love and other people with whom she had nothing in common to share with. She thinks that "*perhaps it was her writing that kept her going, that kept her alive*". (127)

Seeing Mira through her poems, Urmila learns that Mira even felt the burden of her femininity. She realises that she too was trapped like her mother with no further escape.

*Whose face is this I see in the mirror, unsmiling,
grave, bedewed with fear ? The daughter? No,
Mother, I am now your shadow. (126)*

Pain, joy and fear are inextricably intertwined. The pain of childbirth results in the joy of seeing ones own child and no one, not even Mira is spared of this anticipatory joy of giving birth to a child her creation, all the way. Even in the midst of vulnerable pain and fear of being trapped forever, Mira is aware of the new-found love for her unborn child. But Mira is unfortunate even in this - she dies in childbirth "... *having bled to death within an hour after her child was born*". (136)

Thus Mira stands as a classic example of the multitude of unfortunate women who are forced into a loveless marriage and finally succumb to the lust of their husbands. Urmila's involvement with Shakutai, her sister and daughter bring to light the manner in which the stamp of the traditional culture is operative in the sexual disparities between men and women of the lower class. Kalpana, Shakutai's daughter, is raped and the mother assumes that her daughter has been injured in a car accident. On examination, the doctor confirms and informs Shakutai that she has been brutally raped and in the process, she is physically and mentally injured. Shakutai sees her Kalpana who appears to be lying like a vegetable dead or alive. Shakutai is shocked and hysterically she tells Vanaa, "*It's not true, you people are trying to blacken my daughter's name*". (58)

Urmila, to her surprise, realises how the imperatives of physical protection, economic support and social approval undermine the instinctive sympathy of the mother for her daughter. While overhearing a conversation between Vanaa and Dr. Bhasker, the doctor-in-charge, Shakutai recoils in

fear against the word 'report' and she cries, "... *don't tell any one, I will never be able to hold up my head again. Who'll marry the girl, we are decent people. Doctor*". (58)

The mother like the rest of the society blames her daughter for the state she has arrived at. She is relieved when the doctor's report describes Kalpana's rape incident as a car accident. Regardless of the fact that Shakutai has been abandoned by her husband for another woman, she is extremely anxious to get Kalpana settled. Mira too was a victim of physical abuse years ago but neither then nor now the mothers of these silent suffering victims stand by their unfortunate daughters as they dare not to defy the norms of the society. While Mira's mother kept silent and stood helpless at the misery of her daughter, Kalpana's mother hovers over the family name.

Urmila now becomes a regular visitor to Shakutai's home in the slums to inquire after Kalpana's condition. Shakutai, on the one hand is proud of her daughter's beauty but, on the other hand, resents her behaviour. She holds her daughter responsible for her own tragedy.

*She's shamed us, we can never wipe off this blot.
And Prakash blames me. What could I do? She was
so self-willed. Cover your self decently, I kept telling
her, men are like animals. But she went her way.
You should have seen her walking out, head in the
air caring for nobody. It's all her fault, Urmila all
her fault. (147)*

Shakutai's outburst brings to light the partisan attitude prevalent in the patriarchal society. If a girl is raped, for no fault of hers, she alone is censured, and victimised. Thus Shakutai, in spite of all her motherly love and sympathy for her daughter, sees that Kalpana's bold independence as the real reason for this catastrophe. The only conclusion that Shakutai is able to arrive at is, "*... we have to keep to our places, we can never step out. There are always people waiting to throw stones at us, our own people first of all*". (148)

Besides the reality of Kalpana being raped, the police prefer to record it as a car accident. Dr. Bhasker severely protests in rage at the case being reported as an accident. He tells Urmila that there are obvious signs of rape on the badly mauled Kalpana. Even the police officer tries to convince them that this case must be recorded as an accident in the name of female honour. "*...think of the girl and her family. Do you think it'll do them any good to have it known the girl was raped? She's unmarried, people are bound to talk, her name would be smeared*". (88)

Hence, it is advisable that the victim chooses to remain silent and anonymous rather than attract notice by making hue and cry demanding justice. Even after her nightmarish married life with a husband who neglects her and finally leaves her to live with another woman, she still lives and is much worried about the issue and subsequent effects of marriage prospects on Kalpana. Dr. Bhasker, puzzled at this strange behaviour, comments : "*Women are astonishing. I think it takes a hell of lot of courage for a woman like that even to think of marriage ...*". (87)

Urmila, raged at the indignity heaped on Kalpana, wants to report this matter to the officials, but Shakutai begs Urmila not to do that. Urmila tries to explain to Shakutai that Kalpana is not at fault and the man who did this to her is the wrong doer and therefore, he is to be blamed and not she. "*She was hurt, she was injured, wronged by a man; she didn't do any thing wrong. Why can't you see that? Are you blind? It is not her fault, no, not her fault at all*". (147) Urmila is shocked to find that every one wants to hush up a rape case, and in the process the rapist is able to get away scot free. Further, Shakutai too does not like the case to be registered and given publicity. "... even if it is true, keep it to yourself, doctor, don't let anyone know of it". (59)

Instead of pointing to the bestiality and violence perpetrated by the rapist, most people like Kalpana's mother find it easier to blame the girl. "And if you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they will leave you alone" (146). The noted Indian English novelist Mulk Raj Anand feels :

No woman in our land is beyond the threat of rape, because of the suppressed energies of the male, through the taboos of patriarchy which deny sex before marriage and make male into wanton animals who assault any possible victim when possessed by lust. (Anand : 33)

Though Urmila is filled with all sympathies for Kalpana, she is unable to do anything. In a way, she remains as a mute spectator. Shakutai, at a point, even wishes for her daughter's death. She says "but sometimes I think the only thing that can help Kalpana now is death." (178)

Urmila's crusade for helping Kalpana does not receive the approval even at her home. When the hospital authorities wanted to shift Kalpana to a suburban hospital, Urmila rages in protest and decides to take the matter to the press, so that Kalpana's case may get the required justice. So far, Indu (RS), Saru (DHNT) and Jaya (TLS) have fought their own battles. Urmila is Shashi Deshpande's first protagonist who decides to fight another woman's battle. She succeeds in annulling the transfer of Kalpana to another hospital. Back at her home, Urmila's friend Vanaa and her mother Inni cannot understand her deep involvement with the girl. Vanaa always warns her: *'It's none of our business'*. (171) Despite all this opposition, Urmila pursues the case and sees that eventually it is reopened. The police are asked to present their new investigations. With the help of Malcolm, Urmila presents Kalpana's case in the press. Very soon the issue gains public attention and the government orders a deep investigation. Soon there is a demonstration of protest outside Kalpana's hospital. Number of women pour in from all walks of life. The pictures of women being jostled and roughed up during the demonstration are all reported in papers. But for Shakutai exposure to the media is as bad as Kalpana being raped. The fear of humiliation in society resulting from exposure of such incidents grips Shakutai. The women in the assembly and all local women activists now stand in solidarity. Initially resentful, Shakutai now seems to be slowly realising the enormity of the situation.

Shakutai's morality is enhanced and overwhelmed at the demonstration and tides of protests from women folk. She says "*the whole*

world is my friend". (179) Later, the police investigation brings the rapist into light. The final revelation opens up to find Sulu's husband Prabhakar who had always lusted after Kalpana. This revelation shatters Sulu who immolates herself in guilty despair, leaving behind her grief-stricken sister, Shakutai, and for the first time, Kalpana's mother asks "*Should I tell the police*"? (194) If marriage is the only means of security for people like Shakutai, Mira and Sulu are women who are physically vulnerable even within the secure structure of marriage. Urmila learns from Shakutai that Sulu always lived in constant terror of being thrown out of her house because she cannot have children. Urmila's accusation of her mother for leaving her with her grandparents in her childhood brings to light the degree to which Indian women are subjected to domination by their husbands. She explains to her daughter that it was her father and not she who had sent her away, for he did not trust his wife in matters relating to childcare. This is because once in severe urgency Inni had left the infant Urmila under the care of a man servant. Inni pours out all the anguish of a helpless woman, who has nothing to do before the stern dictates of her husband. She says:

*He didn't say anything to me, he just took you away
... I begged him, Urmi, I cried, I promised him I'd
never leave you alone, but he wouldn't listen.
Nothing could make him change his mind. You
know your Papa ... I didn't want you to be sent
away to Ranidurg, believe me Urmi, I didn't want
that, I wanted you with us, I never got used to the
idea of your being in Ranidurg, I wanted you with
me..." (199-200)*

Urmila is aware that women at different levels irrespective of their social backgrounds are given raw deal. It could be so in the case of low class illiterate women from chawls like Shakutai and Sulu or the urban-bred, educated women like Urmila's mother, Inni, her friend Vanaa, and her mother-in-law, Akka. Urmila is furious of the way even educated urban women submit themselves to safeguard their marriage. While Urmila is a modern woman, Vanaa is traditional, even though educated, and is a social worker by profession. She is submissive and obedient to her husband. Vanaa's constant repetition of "Harish says" irritates Urmila and she reprimands Vanaa "*Assert yourself, you don't have to crawl before him, do you?*" (80) Later, Urmila becomes much more irritated with Vanaa who is unable to assert herself before her husband even in matters where she should be making the choice. She secretly longs to have a son. Soon after the birth of their second child, who happens to be a daughter again, Vanaa tells Harish about her desire to have a son. Harish decides to have no more children and quotes population figures and wonders at her wish which silences her. She even begins to think, "He is right" Urmila, on listening to this, becomes furious and bursts out : *You "let him bulldozer you, you crawl before him..."* (81) She also admonishes Vanaa for trying to cope with her domestic duties single-handedly and argues with her when she tries to speak on behalf of her husband.

'Why can't Harish help' ?

"He comes home so tired..."

"You know, Vanaa, what you're going to become,

coping with everything the way you are”?

“What” ?

“A Super-woman”

“Good ! And doesn’t that make Harish a Superman ?...(81)”

As Urmila observes, the common idea of holding the mother to be sole responsible for taking care of the children has remained the same without any new signs of change. From the days of Inni to the days of her grand daughter, Mandira, confining women to the subjugated roles of mothers and wives has not changed at all. The little Mandira, who strongly believes that a woman’s primary duty is to take care of her family, resents her mother going to work leaving her and her sister in the care of an ayah. She tells Urmila scornfully: “*When I grow up, I’m never going to leave my children to go to work.*” (72) In spite of belonging to the modern educated urban society and being exposed to the liberal revolutionary ideas and changes shaping in the western world in the name of women’s liberation movements, the role and position of Indian women has been just relegated to that of wives and mothers only. The unfairness deeprooted in Indian society towards women comes as an illustration with the marriage of Akka. She is made to marry a widower with a child. Instructions and warnings often come to her even before her wedding could take place, that her prospective husband has been greatly involved with the memories of his wife and now after her death, all that interests him is only his son. Further, she is informed that his marriage with Akka is only to give his son a mother. As Akka keeps narrating her story to Vanaa, Urmila thinks: “*The cruelty, the enormous cruelty of that silenced us*”. (47) Stories like this are

only a tip of an iceberg that describe the fate of many women who are made to live, and are forced stoically to accept marriage under the pressure of societal norms. To those women, marriage is the only goal in the life of a girl and the most difficult task on earth is to find a groom. Taking all these threadbare facts into consideration, Akka willingly agrees to marry Kishore's father, with the growing shadow of his dead wife.

Acquaintance with Shakutai provides an opportunity for Urmila to have a glimpse at the lives of women living in the slums. Shakutai's husband leaves her with her parents and goes to Bombay in search of livelihood. Even after six months he does not make any effort to take his wife there. Finding it difficult to stay any longer in her parent's house, Shakutai herself goes to Bombay to join him. Since he does not have a fixed job and a regular income, they have to put up in their relative's house, however humiliating such life to Shakutai is. With three children born, the burden of the family falls on her. In spite of her doing all kinds of work to support her family, her husband deserts her for another woman. It suddenly dawns on Shakutai, who has an irresistible desire to have her mangalasutra in gold. How foolish her desire is. She tells Urmila:

Then one day I thought the man himself is so worthless, why should I bother to have this thing made in precious gold? That's been the greatest misfortune of my life, ... marrying that man. (110)

In spite of bearing the burden of such worthless husband and struggling all alone to find a good life for her children, Shakutai finds herself always pointed out if something in the family goes wrong, as she tells Urmila

What can you expect, they say, of a girl whose mother has left her husband ? Imagine ! He left me for another woman, left me with these children to bring up. (147)

As Urmila understands from the lives of Shakutai and Sulu, a sense of insecurity in marriage haunts them. Affectionate and good-natured, Sulu tries to help her sister Shakutai in every possible way. Despite resistance from Kalpana, she takes over the responsibilities of bringing her up. Urmila also learns that she has a penchant for house-keeping and decoration which goes unrecognised by her husband who never bothers to appreciate her work. There is the constant hidden fear lurking in her. Shakutai tells Urmila :

'After marriage she changed. She was frightened, always frightened. What if he doesn't like this, what if he wants that, what if he is angry with me, what if he throws me out...? No body should live like that, Urmila, so full of fears. What kind of life is it ?...' (195)

Urmila understands how self-confidence of a vivacious girl can be shattered by the Indian institution of marriage system which transforms her into a fearful and nervous woman. But, Shanthi Sivaraman observes, "*Urmila is different, ...wants to assert herself and not crawl before man*".

(*Sivaraman* : 136) Urmila does not display any radical attitude towards the institution of marriage. In her conversation with Dr.Bhasker, Urmila explains her clearcut feelings on the system associated with marriage. Urmila is of the opinion that marriage is a necessity for women and especially for women like Shakutai, marriage means security, as it provides safety from other men. At the same time Urmi's own marriage to a man of choice whom she knew from childhood is far from satisfactory. There is incompatibility springing mainly from Kishore's withdrawing nature. When Vanaa advises her to be more careful about relationship with Dr.Bhasker, Urmila thinks:

But how can Vanaa, secure in the fortress of her marriage to Harish, understand, what it is like-marriage with a man who flits into my life a few months in a year and flits out again, leaving nothing of himself behind? Often, after he has gone, I find in myself a frantic grappling for his image, as if in going he has taken that away as well. (164)

Long separation from her husband sometimes gives her an opportunity to think of another relationship and there are even moments when she overcomes a longing for physical gratification during her husband's long absence from her and their home. Her friendship with Dr. Bhasker provides ample opportunity to satisfy her urge, for Dr. Bhasker has declared his love for her. Though Urmila perilously comes close to respond to Bhasker, she just

holds back and thinks : "It's so much easier, so much simpler, to just think of virtue and chastity and being a good wife". (166)

To Urmila happiness in her marriage was magical, while to her mother a constant pre-occupation with her husband's feelings. It is this marital bond that makes Urmila reject Bhasker's overtures - a decision which could not be taken so firmly by Shashi Deshpande's other protagonists, like Indu, Saru and Jaya. Urmila never dares to overstep the boundaries chalked out in the system of marriage. Whether this virtue will be ever acknowledged by husband or not, it goes unsaid. Urmila loves her husband so dearly that when Dr. Bhasker asks her whether she loves him, Urmila confesses "*I love my husband and therefore, I am an inviolate*". (165) In another context also she reiterates: "*Yes, I was honest when I told Vanaa I am safe*'. (165) Commenting on Urmila's relationship with her husband, J.P. Tripathi says:

"Urmila, the sailor's wife and college teacher, is more self-reliant and has an identity different from that of her husband; she is self-respecting and does not want to live on Kishore's money. She is, however, a sensitive vine and needs Kishore as an Oak to entwine herself around" (J.P.Tripathi : 152).

Urmila, at every turn of the novel, emerges fully aware of the unequal treatment meted out to women. Her encouragement to Vanaa to be more assertive in life and not be just a door mat, her sympathies with Shakutai, her effort to take up the task of translating the poems written by her dead-

mother-in-law from Kannada to English and her strong intention of publishing them are praiseworthy. She takes up cudgels on behalf of the rape victim Kalpana and becomes instrumental in publicising the case which in normal course of Indian hypocritical societal situation, could not be possible to the lower class. No other character in Shashi Deshpande's earlier novels is so rebellious like Urmila. Till now all her characters may be independent to some extent but are firmly bound by the shackles of tradition. Moreover, the protagonists in the earlier novels are aware of the inequalities in society but they do not attempt to set them right. Indira Nityanandham observes :

The Binding Vine is a refreshing change from the first three novels of Deshpande. Protest comes easily to her protagonists here and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes. The hope for Indian women lies in the happy fact that though here are Miras and Kalpanas and Shakutais, we also have our Urmilas.
(Nityanandham : 66)

Urmila may be educated and exposed to Western ideas but nowhere does she show that she agrees with Simone de Beauvoir's belief that marriage diminishes man but almost always it annihilates woman. Besides, Urmila is able to see the contrast between her life and the terrible life that these women have been forced to lead. There is Mira's mother who, going by Mira's account of her, could not think of a life of her own separated from the

destinies of her children. Even though Mira lived a generation ahead of Urmila, she comes across as a person aware of her identity, and as one who is aware of her assigned roles of mother and wife. A page in the diary of Mira has ample evidence of this:

I remember the day the astrologer came home. He read all our horoscopes,... only my Mother's horoscope was not read. Don't you want to know your future?" I asked her. And she said 'What's there? in my life apart from all of you ? If I know all of you are well and happy, I'm happy too.' Did she really mean that ? Will I become that way too, indifferent to my own life, thinking it nothing? I don't want to. I won't. I think so now, but maybe my mother thought like me when she was my age. It frightens me. No, it doesn't, I'll never think my life, myself nothing, never. (101)

Urmila realises the difference between her life and lives of the others and thinks: *I've managed, but "I've been lucky, that's all. While these women....they never had a chance". (174)* While Kalpana's mother moans, "*why does God give us daughters... ?*" (60) To Urmila, who is mourning the recent death of her infant daughter Anu, the thought is jarring: "*We dream so much more for our daughters than we do for our sons, we want to give them the world we dreamt of for ourselves*". (124) Urmila's grand parents who brought her up believe in giving freedom to girls. Thus, she had the freedom to make choices and so naturally plans the same for her child "*I will let her*

soar, I had thought, I will let nothing fetter her, not even my love. She will go far, she will climb high, she will do anything she wants." (124)

Later, Shakutai's self-accusation reminds Urmila of her father's confessing guilt when he was dying of cancer. With a penitent tone, he begs for her forgiveness for leaving her at Ranidurg when she was young. Having lost her daughter, Urmila now realizes that she too is not free from the pangs of guilty conscience and the morbid self-questioning within herself, whether or not she had been a good mother to Anu. She feels that perhaps the answer lies in carrying the burdens of the dying and the dead as life would acquire a meaning by that very act.

Urmila is practical unlike the pseudo feminist Preeti who is overenthusiastic to fight for equal rights for women. To her, Preeti is a symbol of the shallow female opportunist without integrity. Once she talks with Urmila regarding the judgement in a case filed by a husband against his wife to reinstate their conjugal rights. Preeti excitedly says that the judge had delivered his judgement stating that a wife could not be forced to have physical relationship with her husband against her will. On reading this judgement, Preeti joyfully cries, "...Isn't it radical, absolutely earthshaking, in this country, I mean ? Can you imagine the consequences ?". (37) Soberly, Urmila reminds Preeti that one judgement by a single judge will not make any difference to all the womankind. She further says that laws cannot change women's lives and there are not many women who can appeal or file in a court of law in such matters. Preethi's request for Mira's story to make a film out of it is turned down by Urmila and this perhaps brings out

Urmila's moderation even in her feminism. She values the sanctity of womanhood and marriage.

Like Nayantara Sahgal's protagonists, Simrit of **A Day in Shadow**, Saroj of **Storm in Chandigarh** and Sonali of **Rich like us**, Urmila too does not exhibit male-hatredness. She has no desire to seek a world without men. She only wishes for a world where women are treated equal to men. Luckily for her, she finds like-minded male friends, one is Dr. Bhasker to whom Urmila is not just a wife of somebody but an individual with an identity of her own. He even falls in love with her impressed by her passion for truth and justice. Malcolm and Dr. Jain are also essentially humane and have great respect for Urmila.

The sudden revelation of the rift between Urmila and many of her people make Urmila ponder once again how difficult relationships are, with too many chasms to bridge. As Urmila now understands that the relationship between her Papa and Inni, Baiajjs and Aju, Vanaa and Harish, Vanaa and her daughters, Shakutai and Kalpana are all filled with love and compassion, but it does not prevent them from being cruel to each other, ignited by clashes of egos, desires and self-centred interest. Each relationship can be wholesome only when people themselves are whole. Further, Urmila realizes that the great divide in ourselves is the hardest to bridge and the most difficult one is to accept and live with. When the fates of Mira, Kalpana, Shakutai and Sulu are considered, Urmila regains her courage. She learns that accepting freedom and advantages of her life as a gift, she now decides to be content with her life with a hope that her husband Kishore will remove

his armour of withdrawal one day and thus he could facilitate her to reach him.

Anu has gone but she still has her son Karthik. Urmila realizes that, however burdensome our ties are, however painful our experiences are, one can never give up. In the words of Urmila, "*we struggle to find something with which we can anchor ourselves to this strange world we find ourselves in. Only when we love do we find this anchor*". (137) The main urge is always to survive, to get on with the business of living, even if it comprises a daily routine that takes care of a hundred trifling matters, bringing an order and rhythm to it. She entirely agrees with Mira who says: "*Just as the utter futility of living overwhelms me; I am terrified by the thought of dying, of ceasing to be*". (203)

Shashi Deshpande seems to be engaged in a constructive process of consciousness raising. Her object is to enable the more affluent women to share awareness of sexists' experiences that create co-operation and pave the way for uniting people to find themselves with a strong cord of sisterhood like Rose, Mona and Sonali of Nayanatara Sahgal's **Rich Like Us**. Urmila and Vanaa help each other in their distress and suffering. Vanaa helps Urmila to come out of her emotional crisis. This novel is remarkable as it introduces the concept of female bonding, the desire of one woman for female bonding, and help another who is less fortunate. This is a positive development in Urmila unlike the other protagonists of **Roots and Shadows**, **The Dark Holds No Terrors** and **That Long Silence** who are involved in fighting their own battles and have strong feelings and strive for the need of sisterhood. Urmila strongly believes that women should have the courage to express themselves

and expose the evils of the society fearlessly. She is indignant at their uncomplaining attitude in the name of family honour.

As Urmila realises that love prevents one from being cruel, and it is this love that makes one to accept life as it comes, through detachment. This is the only adhesive that binds people and prevent them from falling and refills and nurtures the sapling of life, with compassion and tolerance even when Shakutai cries as Urmila understands, "*this is how life is for most of us, most of the time; we are absorbed in the daily routine of living. The main urge is always to survive*". (203)

The need to express one's feelings and the need to be heard by the society is an all-pervading urge for the present-day women. If Indu and Jaya are fulfilled individuals, it is because both of them attempt to write, face resistance and find the strength to decide what they want to write. Unlike them, Urmila draws society's attention to her protest, and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes. Urmila is seen, at the end of the novel, recollecting the bonds of love that provide the "*Springs of Life*" (203) for human survival. She is not a rebel against the system because she believes that things are gradually improving though at a slow pace.

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Chapter - 6

A Matter of Time

SUMI : DAUNTLESS IN ADVERSITY

The day for moving mountains is coming,
You don't think so?
It is coming: for a while the mountain
sleeps,
But in other times
Mountains all moved in fire. If you do not
believe that,
Oh man, this at least believe:
All sleeping women
Will awake now and move.

- *Yasano Akiko*

If the bonds that bind human life help individuals in continuing their lives despite the betrayals and cruelties associated with human survival, everybody has a life of one's own to live. So is also for Sumi in **A Matter of Time**. She is different from Indu, Saru, Jaya and Urmila - the women protagonists of Shashi Deshpande's earlier novels. Sumi evolves herself from the utter desolation and bitterness linked up with invisible chains of patriarchal pressure and other family responsibilities. She is seen gradually emancipating herself as a new and independent woman. Gopal's desertion makes her experience the trauma of a deserted wife and the anguish of an isolated partner. All the agonies of life corner her at the age of forty and make her stand alone and helpless along with her teenaged daughters Aru, Charu and Seema. Generally, on being deserted, a woman seems to be emotionally

shattered. But Sumi is not emotionally broken. On the other hand, like any responsible mother, Sumi helps her children to get on with their lives as before.

If Indu and Saru seek refuge at their parental homes and Jaya at her Dadar flat, Sumi also, accompanied by her father and her daughters, comes to her parental house. If others submit themselves to introspection and rumination to regain confidence, Sumi straightforwardly decides to face the facts squarely. Almost after 23 years of her marriage with Gopal, a history lecturer in a local college, one evening, for reasons even he cannot articulate, in a very casual way walks out and unburdens his responsibilities as husband and father of three grown up children. Even before Sumi realises the enormity of the situation and burden thrust on her, everything ends leaving Sumi in a shocked silence. Describing the whole scene of Gopal's casual desertion, Keerthi Ramachandra says:

One evening, while Sumi is watching a film on T.V. about circus, "without the dirt, the smells, the fear and despair of the real thing, but sanitized, bacteria free" Gopal tells her he wants to talk to her. And without any preamble says what he has to. He waits for Sumi's reaction, but within moments both realize that there's nothing more to be said and he leaves as quietly as he had entered.
(Keerthi : 21)

Though deserted by her husband for no fault of hers, Sumi learns to pick up the threads of her life. Like Doris Lessing's characters - Mary Turner, Molly, Ella, Marion and Anna of **The Golden Note Book**, and Martha and Maisie of **A Ripple From the Strom**, who opt to be independent and want to seek their identity and individuality in their own way, Sumi too wants to fight her own battle and assert her individuality. Unlike Saroj in **Storm in Chandigarh**, Simrit in **The Day in Shadow**, Rashmi in **This Time of Morning**, Martha in **A Ripple From the Strom**, Molly and Anna in **The Golden Notebook**, Indu in **Roots and Shadows** and Saru in **The Dark Holds No Terrors**, who all leave their husbands, Sumi does not do so, but her husband, Gopal leaves her. Though deserted, Sumi does not contemplate a divorce as she considers this to be of no use to her. Divorce frees a woman legally but the memories attached to the marriage cannot be erased easily. The social stigmas associated with divorce in the Indian society haunt her and she has to continue to struggle and suffer at various levels-economical, emotional and psychological. A woman may get relief from the painful life of a wrong marriage through divorce, but it will not always re-establish her socially, psychologically or financially. Moreover, it can also turn out to be the beginning of another phase of troubles as the divorcee has to further bear the onslaughts of a harsh society which does not allow her to be free and happy. However, luckily for Sumi, she has the full support and sympathy of her parents, sister, cousins and others. This has helped her to a great extent to withstand the shock, pain, humiliation and the trauma of desertion.

Like Indu-Jayant, Saru-Manu, Jaya-Mohan and Urmi-Kishore, Sumi and Gopal also enjoyed harmonious relationship during the early years of their marriage. Theirs too is not the ordinary arranged marriage as Gopal's frequent recapitulations reveal. Their joyous intimate love, physical as well as mental, leads one to understand their conjugal bliss especially in their early years of their marriage. Recounting the rapture of their first union, Gopal thinks "*And I knew then that it was for this, this losing yourself in another human being that men give up their dreams of freedom* ". (223)

However, this happiness seems destined to drift as there is a basic incompatibility, a dissimilarity of temperaments. The fear of being unable to fulfil his obligations as a husband and a father coupled with an intense loneliness and a feeling of isolation from his wife and daughters has compelled him to choose what could easily be termed a coward's way out. Gopal's exit is comparable to that of Nirode's in Anita Desai's **Voices in the City**, and also of Billy Biswas's in Arun Joshi's **A Strange Case of Billy Biswas**.

If Sumi is nonchalant at Gopal's exit, Premi, Sumi's sister, reacts violently. She is filled with anger at the carelessness shown by both Sumi and Gopal towards their lives "...*in throwing away what they had, uncaring, it seems to her, of the value of what they have discarded.*" (136) There does not appear any obvious reason for Gopal's walking out of his family. His inward thoughts always remain unsaid to anybody. He is not able to explain to

Kalyani, Ramesh, Premi or even to his wife Sumi, the reasons that compelled him so much as to isolate himself from his own family members. He only assures them that Sumi is in no way responsible for that decision and therefore she need not be blamed. Kalyani, Sumi's mother, has vague suspicion that Gopal has done this for the sake of money which is not true. Humiliation by his students at the college leading to his resignation from his job does not seem to be the sole reason for his momentous decision. To Premi's probing, Gopal replies "*I can give you so many answers, but I've begun thinking that the plain truth is that I just got tired.*" (133) Miserable at the thought of how history repeats itself, Kalyani bemoans "*my father died worrying about me, my mother couldn't die in peace, she held on to life though she was suffering-she suffered terribly-because of me, she didn't want to leave me and go*" (47). Kalyani further explains to Gopal her own-misery and agony surmounted in her heart all through. She pathetically implores him "*what have you done to my daughter, Gopala don't do this, don't let it happen to my daughter,...*" (46)

Sumi knows that Gopal believes that "*Marriage is not for everyone. The demand it makes-a lifetime of commitment - is not possible for all of us*". (69) She also remembers that when they had decided to get married, Gopal proposed that if either of the two wanted to be free, he or she would be left to go. There should not be handcuffs to tie them together. Reminding Gopal about this, Sumi tells him: "*And I agreed. I was only eighteen then and you were twenty six ... But it meant nothing to me then. How can you think of*

separating, of wanting to be apart, when you are eighteen in love? ... I thought we would always be together" (221)

She is, however, not unconscious of the developments taking place in him. She tells him: "*Then you began to move away from me. I knew exactly when it happened. And I knew I could not stop you, I could do nothing. When you left, I knew I would not question you, I would just let you go.*" (221)

Unlike any other in her place, Sumi does not seek any explanation from Gopal though it is she who bears all the disgrace and humiliation. She knows well that there is no external reason and "*...the reason lies inside him, the reason is him.*" (24) Neither on the day of desertion, nor at any time later, she seeks an answer. However, she desires to ask him only one question, just days after his desertion, which however remains unasked.

... if I meet Gopal I will ask him one question, just one, the question no one has thought of. What is it, Gopal, I will ask him, that makes a man in this age of acquisition and possession walk out on his family and all that he owns? Because, ... it was you who said that we are shaped by the age we live in, by the society we are part of. How then can you, in this age, a part of this society, turn your back on everything in your life? Will you be able to give me an answer to this? (27)

Gopal is grateful to Sumi for not asking any questions and thus saving him of much embarrassment and possible mortification of voicing half truths. Sumi does not even wish to talk about Gopal's act of desertion with anyone.

... what do I say, ... That my husband has left me and I don't know why and maybe he doesn't really know, either ? And that I'm angry and humiliated and confused... ? Let that be, we won't go into it now. (107)

Gopal, the idealist, realises the futility of existence and he says, "*I stopped believing in the life I was leading, suddenly it seemed unreal to me and I knew I could not go on*". (41) To Premi, he discloses his awareness of meaninglessness of life and his consequent loss of faith in it. Quoting Yudhistra, he explains to her the greatest wonder in this world:

"We see people die and yet we go on as if we are going to live forever... that is the greatest marvel this world holds, it's the miracle. Infact, it's the secret of life itself. We knew it's all there, the pain and suffering, old age, loneliness and death, but we think, some how we believe that it's not for us. The day we stop believing in this untruth, the day we face the truth that we too are mortal, that this is our fate as well, it will become difficult, almost impossible to go on ... it happened to me. I stopped believing. The miracle failed for me and there was nothing left. You've got to be the Buddha for that emptiness to be filled with compassion for the world. For me, there was just emptiness. (133-34)

His own inner emptiness is thus explained adequately. The existential alienation which Gopal experiences can be offered as one of the most possible reasons for his transformation leading to his inexplicable desertion of the family.

Sumi views the desertion as 'sanyasa' when she says I've begun to think that what Gopal has really done is to take sanyas. I'm surprised none of you have thought of that. (123) However, it cannot be equated to the Vedic renunciation or 'sanyasa' and if it appears to be renunciation, it is skin-deep only. N.Poovalingam emphasises this fact when he says:

"...the perception ... that Gopal's desertion of his family signifies the Vedic renunciation ... is not entirely convincing ... Gopal abandoning the family is not the result of saturation in the worldly life. He is more a withdrawal in pain than a renunciation due to contentment. Moreover, Gopal's life has nothing to offer in lines corresponding to the other Vedic stages of a man's life.. His predicament is more akin to the existentialist's". (Poovalingam:174)

Gopal's childhood, as he himself reveals, has not been normal. Painfully he realises the fact that his father had taken his brother's widow for marriage and he was born of that union. Gopal's heart seems to be unsettring on this concept though his adolescent mind tries to think of several possible reasons for this marriage. He struggles within himself and undergoes severe inner conflict. His predicament seems to parallel that of Hamlet's.

It was when I read Hamlet, fortunately much later, that the most terrible version of my parents' story entered my mind. Just that once, though, for I slammed the door on it immediately. In this story my father became a man succumbing to his passion for his brother's wife, the woman complaint, a pregnancy and a child to come and then, after the husband's convenient death (no, I couldn't, I just couldn't make my father poison his brother) a marriage of convenience. (43)

Gopal's father is his mother's guilty partner. Their gruesome death leaves him in great confusion and void. What ruins his peace is his painful realisation that even his sister Sudha and he do not share the same father.

Isolated and abandoned, Gopal for long has been nurturing the same feeling of loneliness and desolation.

Eftiness, I realized then, is always waiting for us. The nightmare we most dread, of waking up among total strangers, is one we can never escape. And so it's a lie, it means nothing, it's just deceiving ourselves when we say are not alone. It is the desperation of a drowning person that makes us cling to other humans. All human ties are only a masquerade. Some day, some time, the pretence fails us and we have to face the truth. (52)

Perhaps his insecure childhood, his lack of understanding on the true concept of happiness and ignorance of the true quality of joy could have prompted Gopal to renounce his grihastashrama, and go in pursuit of the eternal bliss. Gopal can be compared to the protagonist of Hermann Hessie's Siddhartha who also deserts his wife and son. However, unlike him, Gopal is yet to find solution to his loneliness and achieve peace. Gopal's best efforts to articulate the reason for his desertion fail to convince any one and the least of all of them is Aru, his daughter, like 'yaksha', she questions him and even decides to sue him for she can never forgive his irresponsibility. To her, it is "... *not just a tragedy, it is both a shame and a disgrace*". (13) She does not want him to get away scotfree while they have to face the disgrace, shame and humiliation the desertion brings. Her demand for family maintenance is not approved by Sumi who endures the pain with patience, self-respect and magnanimity.

Gopal's desertion upsets everyone in the family, more so his wife, Sumi. But, surprisingly, his departure has brought out her real hidden strength. Right from her marriage, Sumi has been a content wife and mother and has willingly subordinated herself to her husband and daughters. Keerthi Ramachandra aptly comments on the subjugation of Sumi as the traditional Indian woman when she says, "*her occasional insights into the human conditions, her interpretation of Draupadi's reveal a sharp mind but one that had deliberately shut itself off*". (Keerthi : 21) Though disappointed and frustrated, Sumi seeks to cope with disgrace and humiliation of desertion in an admirable way. She surrounds herself with a death-like silence which

can convey her pain more effectively than words can express. When all the family members curse, cry and agonise over Gopal's desertion, the only person to meet Gopal without rancour is his wife, Sumi, who recognises the essential loneliness of all human beings and so sets him free. This cannot be called passivity. She deliberately plays cool and maintains her matter-of-fact attitude. Her patience, tolerance, sense of equanimity and stoicism makes her an 'enigma'. As Shashi Deshpande observes :

Sumi's acceptance is not passive. She blocks out the unpleasantness. She has a good opinion of herself; she is more concerned with getting on with life. She does not want pity; She would do anything for pride. She distances even her husband. The point is, they are both unusual people. People are puzzled by the abandoned wife not feeling bad. (Vimala Rama Rao : 131)

Like Nanda Kaul of Anita Desai's **Fire on the Mountain**, who is too proud to disclose her hurt feelings to her husband, who wronged her, Sumi also dislikes to unlock her heart and lay bare her emotions to Gopal. Her pride prevents her to show her grief to him. Nor she requests him to come back to her. She controls her feelings and looks composed and equanimous to the outside world. She thinks that it is important for women like her to retain her feelings as she observes:

... the picture she presents to the world is one of grace and courage, to be admired rather than pitied. Unchanged, except for a feeling which only those who know her well are aware of - of something missing in her. (172)

In her parent's house, she feels she is lost and has no place there. Herself-control prevents her from demonstrating her grief "... *she fully realises that tying a lacerated heart to one's wrist and showing it to the world is meaningless.*" (Pathak : 159)

Revealing an independent and individualistic spirit just as her predecessors Indu, Saru, Jaya and Urmi have done, Sumi refuses to accept any kind of economic assistance either from her parents or from Premi, her doctor sister or from Ramesh, Gopal's doctor nephew. Working as a teacher, though on a temporary basis, she wants to stand on her own legs and assert her identity. As Sumi picks up her heart and prepares for the future, she thinks,

"... retracing my steps, picking up things, thinking - is this it ? But she has turned resolutely away from even her immediate past, she is preparing herself for the future..." (122)

She looks for a permanent job, and with great determination learns to ride a two-wheeler, at her age. As soon as she learns to balance her drive, she throws up her arms in triumph of her success. She even decides to move out of her parent's house to live independently with her daughters and frantically searches for a house. Though her parents do not consider them a burden, Sumi

is unwilling to stay there. Later, however, she is persuaded to give up the idea considering the impracticalities associated with moving out of the big house, which is spacious enough to accommodate her family, into an expensive and congested apartment.

Till Sumi picks up the threads of her life and shows her will - power and independence, she appears to be a spineless woman and an indifferent moron, too dull to grasp the situation. Though beautiful, educated and courageous, she lacks the spark of Indu, Saru, Jaya and Urmī. However, with stoicism, Sumi meets the disapproving comments from women like Shankar's mother, who says:

'When are you going back to your husband'... 'you should be with him'. Look at his state! It's all right to stay with your parents for a while, but that's not your home... Go back to your husband, he's a good man. If you've done wrong, he'll forgive you. And if he has - woman shouldn't have any pride". (161)

Sumi wonders the way, even today, the fate of women being measured only through their marital status. A woman in the society gets respect only if she has her husband, irrespective of the number of wives or mistresses he has, their incompatibility, his cruel treatment of, or his stony silence with, his wife. It is enough if they live together under the same roof because '*what is a woman without a husband?*' (167) Sumi thinks of her parents, Kalyani and Shripati, who live like strangers under the same roof and have not spoken for years. "*But her kumkum is intact and she can move in the company of women*

with the pride of a wife." (167) Sumi cannot comprehend the meaning of such an existence, which is no existence in the true sense. She ponders :

Is it enough to have a husband, and never mind the fact that he has not looked at your face for years, never mind the fact that he has not spoken to you for decades ? Does this wifehood make up for everything, for the deprivation of a man's love, for the feel of his body against yours, the warmth of his breath on your face, the touch of his lips on yours, his hands on your breasts?... (167)

But Kalyani, like a majority of women, accepts life as it is, and when she has to put her signature, she signs her name carefully as Kalyani Bai Pandit. Aru is amazed at this, "*how can she still have his name for god's sake ?*" (140)

It is not that easy for a woman, separated or divorced from her husband, to begin a new life. Rashmi in Nayantara Sahgal's **This Time of Morning** also feels the same after divorce. She thinks there is no such a thing as a clean break. Even Simrit **A Day in Shadow**, before she finds fulfilment in her friendship with Raj, used to feel guilty for violating the sacred bond of marriage and to seek divorce. Her own traditional convictions have pricked her. Unlike Simrit, Sumi does not seek divorce - separation is thrust upon her. Yet she displays rare courage and self-confidence in trying to cope with such a situation all by herself.

A wife is so dependent on her husband that his absence makes her miserable. Sudha, Gopal's sister, for instance, was very active when her

husband P.K. was alive. But after his death she becomes very peevish, self-centered and almost an invalid. It appears as though all the activity of her life has been evaporated from her. On the contrary, Sumi, after Gopal's walk-out, revives her creativity. She writes a play "The Gardener's Son" for the school function which becomes a success and she rejoices: "*It feels so good and now suddenly I want to do so many things*".(231) Inspired by this success, she now desires to rewrite the story of Surpanakha in the Ramayana from a different perspective, from Surpanakha's view-point. She reflects:

Female sexuality. We 're ashamed of owning it, we can't speak of it, not even to our own selves. But Surpanakha was not, she spoke of her desires, she flaunted them. And therefore, were the men, unused to such women, frightened ? Did they feel threatened by her? I think so. Surpanakha, neither ugly nor hideous, but a woman charged with sexuality, nor frightened of displaying it - it is this Surpanakha I'm going to write about. (191)

This reflects Sumi's modern progressive outlook. She is anxious that man-woman relationships should be sound, equal and non-partisan. Sumi stands for responsibility, motherly love, care and concern. Every moment she is seen worried about her grown-up daughter's. She who refuses to be treated as an inferior woman in the society boosts her daughters spirit waned by the adversity. She is perfectly aware of her responsibility as a mother-cum-single parent to her daughters. When Aru and she met with an accident, she becomes

totally frantic and cries for help despite the profuse bleeding from her own injuries. After taking her to hospital, she neither leaves her nor takes rest. She is worried about her daughter, who is dejected with her father's desertion. She desires that her daughter's life should be easy and comfortable. She fervently hopes: "*I want her to enjoy the good things in life, I want her to taste life, I want her to relish it and not spit it out because she finds it bitter.*" (220)

Sumi reveals essentially an optimistic vision of life. Like Sonali of Nayantara Sahgal's **Rich Like Us**, she is also never dejected and forlorn with her life. She demonstrates strength and maturity even in adversity. She never wants her life to end like that of her mother's. She identifies her relation with Gopal in a more matured way and recognises that Gopal's life always has a different concept and a different identity. "*Our journeys are always separate, that's how they're meant to be. If we travel together for a while, that's only a coincidence.*" (212)

At the age of forty, Sumi starts her life afresh. She gets an appointment in a school and wants to go there with Seema, her daughter. She meets Gopal to inform this, recalls and shares a memory and departs on the note of laughter. One day is never exactly like another, each moment is different, human life is always on the brink of uncertainty. This happens with Sumi too at the end. Sumi and her father start from their big house to the bank near by. Unfortunately, they meet with an accident while Sumi riding the scooter and die leaving the grief - stricken teenaged children, Gouda and Kalyani. Even as she is preparing for a fuller life, it is an irony of fate that her life is cut off in

the prime. It is a pity that Sumi dies when she is taking up a job to support herself and her daughters. Had she lived, she would have certainly become an economically independent woman with modern and matured outlook towards life and, at the same time, a loving and responsible mother. Perhaps, through Aru, the novelist looks hopefully at the younger generation to penetrate the silence, make women realise their situation and speak up for themselves. Inheriting her mother's pride and dignity, courage and confidence, Aru assures her father that they will be all right. "*We'll be quite alright, don't worry about us*". (246) She says.

Modern and liberal in outlook, Sumi defies the outdated social opinion and orthodox treatment of a woman subjected to desertion by her husband. She has the courage to rise above the consequential problems and difficulties, humiliations and frustrations. She has the generosity to gracefully free her husband from marital bonds without venting ill-feelings. Sumi, thus, comes a long way from Indu, Jaya, Saru and even Urmī for whom marriage is mostly the be - all and end - all of their existence. They dread loneliness and disintegration resulting from a broken marriage and hence opt for a compromise without of course losing their individualities. But Sumi is confident of her capabilities to make choices and assumes control over her life. The courage, the dignity, the responsibility and the independent spirit displayed by her proves that she has reached a stage of self - sufficiency and self - fulfilment. She proves that women like her are capable of ushering in a positive change in the social structure.

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Chapter - 7

Conclusion

CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters have been devoted to the study of women protagonists in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. She portrays modern, educated and career-oriented middle class married women who are sensitive to the changing times and situations. Revealing a remarkable insight into the nature of a woman's mind, she depicts woman in myriad roles - wife, mother, daughter and an individual in her own right. She always concerns herself with a woman's search for her identity. She endeavours to establish woman as an individual who breaks loose from the traditional constraints and refines her identity in tune with the changed social ambience of the modern times.

Indu, in Shashi Deshpande's first published novel, **Roots and Shadows**, is one who, in her quest to be independent and complete, realises that there is beauty and security in life through reconciliation. Indu's predicament is representative of the larger predicament of women in general in contemporary Indian society which is passing through a transition from the old cultural modes to the new socio-economic forces impinging effectively on the pattern of human lives. Indu represents a woman torn between age-old traditions and individual views. Because of her awareness of the sanctity of the familial bonds, she restrains herself from the precipitous action of feeling from the domestic scene. Though she views these bonds as unreasonable in the beginning, gradually, she learns to be bound by them as a typical traditional Indian woman, for she knows that transgressing them will certainly rupture the family ties. She realises that it would be wise

to seek freedom without undermining her obligations and responsibilities and without losing her individuality. Indu's decision not to submit herself to anyone's dictates, not to get influenced by her husband in career matters shows that she is making independent decisions. Her search for freedom results in her emergence as a bold and challenging woman of determination. She negates all feminine limitations and also acquires the power to change others.

Saru of **The Dark Holds No Terrors** is the representative of middle-class working women in modern India, rebelling against traditions but ultimately trying to compromise with existing reality. When her professional success has cast a shadow on her married life, she undergoes a trauma, but eventually stands up to the situation. She realises that escapism is never a solution and that she is her own refuge. She succeeds in realizing her selfhood through her profession and proves to the world that economically independent women like her can bring change in the society and that women as individuals can have some significant control over their relationships and professions. Her promise of reconciliation with her husband is not her defeat or submission but her new found confidence to confront reality. Thus, she achieves freedom and harmony in life without compromising on her obligations and responsibilities.

Jaya, a modern woman rooted in tradition, experiences an impulsive desire to be emancipated and, at the same time, an almost instinctive urge to be traditional and conservative. As a result, she tries simultaneously to be

a suitable wife and to retain her identity as an individual. However, in order to fulfil her roles as wife and mother, as Mohan wants her to be, she gradually transforms herself to be a stereotyped house-wife always trying to please her husband. But slowly she begins to realise that her very compromise shatters her individuality. She realises that women have allowed themselves to be victimised instead of bargaining for partnership and that she also has contributed to her victimization and that she has to fight her own battle and work out her own strategy. Accordingly, she decides that she will live afterwards without sacrificing her identity or individuality. She, no doubt, makes some adjustment of her own volition, taking care to see that she does not lapse into servility. Her decision to have her own way gives a new confidence to her and this confidence brings her emancipation.

If Indu, Saru and Jaya are involved in fighting their own battles, Urmila of **The Binding Vine** is ahead of them by her endeavours to help other women - the poor and the downtrodden. She strongly believes that women should have the courage to express themselves and expose the evils of the society fearlessly. She is indignant at the uncomplaining attitude of the victims in the name of family honour. Accordingly, she exhibits interest and capacity to purge the society of its evils. If her predecessors finally emerge as fulfilled individuals finding the strength to decide what they want to do, Urmila is an independent individual from the beginning with an identity of her own. Urmila draws the society's attention to the inequality of sexes and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes. In spite of all this, she does not rebel against the established system because she believes that things are improving gradually but surely, though at a slow pace.

Sumi of *A Matter of Time* gradually emancipates herself as a new and independent woman from the utter desolation and trauma of being a deserted wife. At the age of forty, deserted by her husband, she stands alone and helpless along with her three teenaged daughters. But she is not emotionally shattered as is common with housewives without economic independence. On the other hand, she demonstrates strength and maturity even in adversity. She displays rare courage and self-confidence in trying to cope with the consequential problems and difficulties, humiliations and frustrations, all by herself. Unlike any other in her place, she has the generosity to gracefully free her husband from marital bonds without venting ill-feelings. Her desertion, instead of making her an emotional wreck, has surprisingly brought out the real, hidden strength in her. She desires to be economically independent and asserts her identity. She revives even her creativity. She, thus, comes a long way from Indu, Jaya, Saru and even Urmī for whom marriage is mostly the be-all and end-all of their existence. The courage, the dignity, the responsibility and the independent spirit displayed by her proves that she has reached a stage of self-sufficiency and self-fulfilment. Though unfortunately cut off in the prime of her life, through her daughter Aru, Shashi Deshpande seems to look hopefully at the younger generation to restore equality between the sexes and achieve harmony.

Shashi Deshpande seems to be engaged in a constructive process of consciousness raising. Her object is to enable the more affluent women to share awareness of sexists' experiences that create co-operation and pave the way for uniting people to find themselves with a strong cord of sisterhood.

1The novelist does not envisage this female bonding as a solution to male domination but she is confident that it is certainly a comfort to the oppressed women.

Shashi Deshpande appears to believe that by not protesting and offering resistance, the women have to blame themselves for their own victimisation. She, therefore, suggests that they themselves have to break the shackles that have kept them in a state of captivity for several centuries. Finding themselves trapped in the roles assigned to them by society, her women attempt to assert their individuality, and confront their husbands in search of freedom. They try to redefine human relationships. Without rejecting outright the cultural and social background, they realise the need to live in the family but reject the roles prescribed to them by the society. They try to achieve self-identity and independence within the confines of marriage. Thus they manage to extricate themselves from male dominance. At the same time, they are not willing to forgo the security marriage offers them. In short, Shashi Deshpande's women want the best of both the worlds.

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Interview

IN CONVERSATION WITH SHASHI DESHPANDE.

S. PRASANNA SREE

Why do your women protagonists always compromise with their lot?

No, No. I don't agree with that at all. There is no compromise. I mean, for me the women protagonist really don't do anything. It is the thought process which they are going through. At the end of the thought process they see themselves differently. After that, they are going to be different. For eg. Jaya has compromised in her marriage totally, but when she comes into her flat in Dadar, she realises what she has been doing. She knows that she is going to change, so where is the compromise ? There is no moment of compromise, the moment is of change. Not of compromise. She, is going to change her marriage, is going to be different now. She is going to change. She is not going to follow the same path, that's absolutely certain. Same thing with Saru in **The Dark Holds No Terrors**. She realises that the problem has been herself. She had been blaming her mother, her brother, her father and her husband and she realises that the problem has been herself. So she is going to change herself now. So where is the compromise ? If Manu comes she will talk to him. She had been avoiding talking to him so she is confronting the problem now. Where is compromise in confrontation ? If you have believed that it is compromise, then you have not understood my novels ... No they don't go back to the

same point ... My women protagonists are all very intelligent thinking women capable of self-analysis. They don't go back to the same point, they move on. Now where they are moving I'm not specifying. The ending is always open. Because to write that, I have to write another novel. Where they are going from there, you know, they have now decided that they are not going back to where they were, they are moving on... certainly there is a change in their mental attitude, it is going to be spelt out in a change in action, you know there is no compromise. ... For academics... you want a revolution, you want the woman to break off her marriage. You want the woman to run away from the house and because, these things don't happen you consider it as a compromise. I don't consider that the revolution comes out of escaping the situation, but facing the situation with a different idea of "what I am"... this is to me the biggest revolution. I know what I am now, I am going to live my life knowing what I am. There is no greater revolution than that. So I don't agree with compromise at all.

Indu though appears to be liberated, bends to the dictates of others in the family - where do you place her?

... Is it not human - you were a rebellious teenager and you dislike what your elders tell you... at the age of thirty are you going to be the same rebellious teenager ? This is totally a wrong understanding of liberation. Liberation does not mean casting of your humanity. You are

still a human being but you are struggling to understand that you are not going to be shackled by certain things, you know. Certain things are unavoidable. You are a human being. You are living in this society. You are tied to so many other human beings. Certain compromises have to be made, certain responsibilities have to be taken up and certain duties are to be undertaken. Liberation doesn't mean that you run away from all these responsibilities... This is totally a wrong understanding of liberation. Indu who goes back is a woman who is much older than the teenager who rebelled against Akka. There is a world of differences between what you felt for your parents when you were fourteen and what you felt for them when you were thirty five. So it is nothing to do with liberation or listening to people.

If we can call Jaya a liberated person for breaking her long silence, how to account for her seeking security of the family only when there is no indication that Mohan would change?

... Liberation never means doing without the family. No, no, no. To me liberation does not mean leaving your marriage. We are human beings. Human beings are social animals and we need all these ties ... My only thing about liberation is that you don't give into oppression and cruelty and that Jaya at the end comes to the conclusion that she is not going to give in. She is not going to live upto the model of a wife of which her husband Mohan wanted. She is going to be herself. That is true liberation

as far as I am concerned. It does not mean that she has to walk out of the family. Who does not need the security of a family? You tell me is there any human being in this world who doesn't need the security of somebody or the other? So let's not make a difference between what is human need and human need of certain ties called 'love, affection'. Liberation does not do away with all that. Liberation does not mean you do away with all these human needs. Liberation means you refuse to be oppressed, you refuse to give up your individuality, you refuse to do things which go against your conscience. You realise the potential you have within you, you don't let other people tell you what to do. You know what you are worth. You know what is your value. You take that into account, and this is liberation. This does not mean doing away with all ties

Indu, Saru and Jaya seek liberation from their parental homes but later come to parents' houses only to review their own lives. Why do you follow the same pattern in novel after novel?

Now it is very difficult for any writer to answer "Why". A novel takes the shape it does. One has no answer, that's how it has come to you, that is how you have to write. I never realised the sameness. When I wrote, it was just how the novel started for me. You know, for Saru, it is very simple that there is this, her mother's death, and she has to face that. So, ultimately it amounts that these women are all carrying the burdens of the past. You know, Jaya is carrying the burden of not only of her

childhood past ... but mainly of her marriage... There comes a time when you stop and take stock ... there is a critical moment in one's life when you come to a particular crisis in your life, you try to stand there and look back, but most of the time you just go on with your life. Only when you confront your past, you can go to the future. And for all these women that moment comes at that time, and for all them the only get away is their parental home. So I don't think there is any particular significance for me. It just happened naturally. I mean, I see a rationale behind any body going back at a moment of crisis which is what we all of us do. Supposing you are facing a broken marriage, there would be a time when you would like to take a stock of it. So it just happens to be a parental home Indu is called back home. She has been married and living a successful professional life. Now that her aunt had called her back home, so naturally she goes home, and naturally certain changes happen to her because now she is confronting her past. For Saru this is deliberate. She wants to go back because after her mother's death, she has to face all that's happening to her - Manu's cruelty, her mother's death, her mother's curse - you know all these things come together... She wants to get away from him, that she can dissolve that. So for her it is like she has to go there, there is no alternative. For Jaya, of course, it was her husband who brought her there, she did not opt to go there. For her, that home opens up a different world where she starts to find her relationships. So there were different reasons for them going there.

The concept of sisterhood is more prominently seen in your two recent novels - THE BINDING VINE and A MATTER OF TIME. Can it be interpreted as your solution to end male domination in the society.

No, I don't find solutions, no, I never look for solutions, they are never easy. I don't see sisterhood as a solution. *Roots and Shadows* is different. *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, and *That Long Silence* are intensely personal. They are totally concentrated on the protagonists and there is very little about anybody else. So I had to move out of that because I had come to the end of that road and I have to move away, and this was more a kind of an outward journey not so much inward journey. This sisterhood is something which I think is a part of Indian society. It's always been there because we live in a particular society where the male and female worlds are always separated until very recently. Men's world and female world rarely came together. What the men were doing was not known to women. They would go out and comeback. What women were doing men generally don't know, because it was the woman's work, it was their problem of cooking, bringing up children and childbirth... and men never concerned themselves with them. At certain points they met, but mostly they were two separate worlds, and it was the women who supported one and another. There must have been cruelty also, lots of cruelty between women, but there is lot of support. It was the woman who supported you when you were in trouble, it was the other women who supported you when you were ill. It was the woman who helped you so,

sisterhood was very important part ... But it has never solved her problems. I don't see that as a solution but certainly it is comfort. For a solution we need men and women to live together. Men and women should live together in a more friendly way. That is a solution that is not going to come through sisterhood. There must be good companionship between men and women. Without that I don't think there is any solution to the problem of women. ...not through sisterhood, sisterhood is only a comfort.

- *Why should women like Sulu kill themselves ? Instead they can leave their husbands or divorce them ? Is death the only alternative to their oppressed lives?*

Sulu is a very particular individual from the very beginning. She has been brought up by her sister. She has been a very shy and introverted individual. She has been very gentle person who is dominated by others. She is totally dominated by her husband. Being the kind of person she is, for her, suicide seems to be the solution. Particularly the shock that her own sister's daughter, who was like a daughter to her, has been raped by her own husband. That shock drives her to suicide. So this is not a solution nor is it something which that I would advocate, but it happens, this is not the kind of escape, I'm suggesting ... there are all kinds of women - there is Shakutai who is so strong, Sulu who is weak, and Kalpana who is so bold. She is one among them. She is a victim because that's the way she is born. Human beings are made differently, we can't impose one solution. I think more than anything else, being the kind of woman she is, she has no alternative. It was logical that she should to go

that way, like I said. It was a shock of what her husband did, more than what her own suffering; are ... It's a shock. A tremendous shock, she can't face her sister who has brought her up, her sister who loved her like her mother and her daughter has been raped by her own husband and she feels party to it because she has pleaded with the woman "let him marry her, let him marry her". She thought if he marries her own sister's daughter, she will be safer, like it won't be a stranger, so partly it is guilt, partly it is shock, partly it is horror, partly it is inability to face the situation. So each person is an individual in a novel and you can't apply any general principles to them.

- *The conflict between mother and daughter is present in all your works. Is there any special reason or interest that made you to choose this ?*

It's a very common theme. Many people have asked me this question, there are also good mothers and daughters like there is Vanaa and her mother in **The Binding Vine**. But Saru and her mother has a very bad conflict... Jaya has problems with her mother, that doesn't mean she doesn't love her mother. I don't see that as a major conflict. There is this major conflict, between Saru and her mother which is the focus of the novel. It is also a plausible and credible thing because such things do happen. Are we all the while tell ourselves that all mothers and daughters always love each other and have no problems ? 'No' nor a while. You get irritated with your mother and that doesn't mean you don't love her, that doesn't mean that you don't care her. The conflict is in Saru and her

mother and in the rest it has a perfect normal mother and daughter relationships. I have a feeling that the people expect the love between mother and daughter to be very lovy and dovy... It is a kind of image that we build up in Hindi Movies... Please look at the reality, I don't write from myths. I write from real life...If I were to go to myths and write I would write different novels, then I have to write like the self sacrificing mothers and totally chaste wives. But unfortunately, I see human beings totally far removed from the myth and I only accept human beings as they are. I've lot of compassion for them but that doesn't mean, that I don't see them for what they are. I see them totally forward. I don't see them as larger than life size, I don't see women as Sita, Savithri and Draupadi. These are all myths. Let us leave them there.

There is change in the attitude of your women protagonists at the end of your novels, but there never seem to be any change or you do not seem to focus on the change in the attitude of men. Why ?

My focus is on women. Even in the real life, during the last 30-40 years, you see women have changed so much. There is a lot of change in the attitude of women, but there is no change in men. This is the reality I've seen. Men are reluctant to change. They still expect things to be what they were. But I don't mean to say that all men are hopeless. Certainly men will change, hopefully. But I am talking about women, you see. I am ending with Jaya, what Mohan is going to do, we don't know. He'll come, may be, as she says, "May be he has changed", why do I presume that, may be he has changed. So the possibilities are always there. In Urmī's

case, her husband is not there. So it's immaterial. **The Binding Vine** is a reflection of patriarchal society and the kind of things women have to face is not changed. We still have rapes and all these things go on - and one thing is true, that men have not changed very much. They are changing but Gopal is different. Gopal has changed at the end of the novel.

Your men characters are meek and seem to be irresponsible as husbands. What is that you indicate by this ?

No, No, if they had been, women could not have to face any problems ... Mohan is a totally responsible husband, don't generalised. Gopal was irresponsible and walked away O.K., I accept that, and I will talk about it, but, don't generalise. There is not even a hint of Indu's husband is like. We don't know. The novel doesn't give out much whether he is responsible or irresponsible ... Manu is not irresponsible, he has a problem ... a Psychological problem ... Manu doesn't like his wife to be superior to him, which is a very normal male feeling. I mean most men would like their wives to be little inferior. Most men are frightened if their wives are little superior to them. Whether it is Indira Gandhi or any body or you take anyone in the world, marriages don't work very well, if women are superior. So that's not irresponsibility. If there is any one you can call irresponsible, I would agree it is Gopal. He walks out, no body else is weak. Gopal is not weak. Manu is a little weak character. He cannot take his wife's success you need to be very strong to take that. Gopal could

have done that, but he is not faced with that situation but Manu can't take his wife's success. He is a weak character but nobody else is a weak character nor is Mohan. Mohan is very much the father of the family. Mohan is looking after the wife, his parents, his sisters, his mother. He is totally a responsible man.

At the end of A MATTER OF TIME, Sumi reaches a stage of self sufficiency, ushering a new hope for women in the society. What made Sumi to die so young and premature ?

No, even I am not happy. I agree with you, I am also not comfortable. It was a shock for me also, that I have no choice, like I did not sit down plan and plot, that Sumi is to die. But when it came to me, that Sumi is to die, I resisted it, for some time. I went the other way round, It did not work. I had to go back, and she had to die. I wished I might ask myself why do people die at all? why is there death in human life. We have both birth and death. So the novel contains a slice of human life, birth is there, death is there. Premature deaths we see all the time. Why people die we cannot say, why did it happen? No body should die young? Certainly it's a tragedy ... my focus was on Aru. So even if Sumi dies that it not the end. Life goes on, there is Aru who is going to flower and who is really going to become something which is going to be very remarkable. I see a remarkable future for Aru. I see tragedy even in life, somebody dies but something nice happens and you come back to hope and optimism. So Aru for me it is a kind of healing touch - Aru's growth, Aru's future. In this

novel we end with the death of Sumi and hint of Aru's future, hint of Aru's growth... She is going to be a lawyer, she's going to do this, she going to find out about the women in the family. Now these hints were important for me. It was not a literary device. It was how I saw it, for me it was important. Genuinely I was getting the glimpses of Aru's future and the novel has to end at this point. But Aru's future was part of her present, you know what she is going to be is contained in what she is now. So those hints came to me, and I put them there. So her future is hinted at. Aru is an independent young woman and she will carry on her own path, but what was important to me was her connection with Kalyani... because it is the most important point in the novel... they come together and for me it is the biggest hope, that is the healing touch, you know. For the old mother, the hurt which was caused by Sumi's death, is healed by Aru and this is how life is always. Life has always to be made possible with the future generations ... this is how it is to me. So even if you see Sumi's death as a tragedy, I see hope here, this link between Aru and her grandmother. They start up by being so hostile. Aru doesn't understand her grand mother. She gets irritated and afterwards she starts thinking about, why has she put up with this from her husband? She starts getting very annoyed with her grand mother. When her mother dies, the grand mother breaks down and then she tells I am your daughter. She literally lives, the role of not only daughter also a son. To me this is very

important part of the novel and it is the healing touch, it is the future, it is the present and it is every thing.

Well, today's women are independent and they are no more appendage to man. What do you say ?

...I don't agree with you ... we are not independent, nor do we have our own identity. We are still appendage to men because our society is shaped like that. Women without male are still little lacking in status. So I don't agree with you. We have a long way to go.

You have said in one of your interviews that you are a feminist but not a feminist writer. Can you just elaborate on this?

... That's very clear ... I am a feminist, I'm a very staunch feminist in my personal life. ... My idea of feminism is like what I told you. A woman is also an individual like a man, she is one half of human society. She is also born like a man with lot of capabilities and potentials. She has every right to develop all that. She should not be oppressed just because she is a female. Like a man she also has her own qualities. She has every right to live her life, to develop her qualities, to take her decisions, to be independent, and to take charge of her own destiny. So all these things to me are part of my being a feminist. I don't mean by that this false idea of liberation that you don't need a family, you don't need parents. We are all part of society and we need some ties. It may not be a husband. You may

want to live with a partner, you may want to have a child without having a marriage, - all these things also are part of it. I don't deny that, but that's not important to me. The important thing to me is that you are incharge of your own destiny, but nobody should oppress you. Cruelty and oppression should not be there between the two genders. This is my idea of feminism. I am a feminist very much, and I strongly react against any kind of cruelty or oppression against women or any kind of denial of opportunities to women because they are women. We are all human beings and we should all have the right to live ourlives. But as a writer I'm not going to use my novels to carry the message of feminism. Then it becomes propaganda. I consider novel as a piece of art and as a piece of art, it can't carry a message. There are struggles of being a woman, in this patriarchal society, it is hard. So this is the picture I present in my novels. I am not telling you what to do nor am I spelling out the message of feminism. I am not a feminist writer. If you call me a feminist writer, you are wronging me, because I see people as human beings. In my novels you will not see bad men and good women. All of us have both the qualities in ourselves, some good and some bad and you know it is all there in my novels and in my characters.

Sumi appears to be more matured, dignified and liberated than her predecessors. While others cannot think of themselves outside the

familial bond, Sumi, finding herself in, is unperturbed. She manages herself admirably and almost becomes self-dependent. Is she your idea of the new woman for whom marriage is only a part of life and not the life?

Sumi is older than other women characters ... her children are much older, so she has matured much more in life than Indu, Saru and Jaya... Sumi is herself a different kind, like all my women who are individuals in their own right, they are human beings to a certain make up. You are an individual born with certain qualities. Each of these women is an individual born with certain different qualities. Sumi is born like that. She is a little detached. That detachment is a part of her, and it is nothing to do with liberation or feminism. That is how she is made, but she is not unperturbed. She suffers acutely because her husband has left her. She does not want to reveal it and she also is a kind of person who wants to 'get on' with her life, she does not want to get struck so that's important thing for her. She is not going to show her hurt to anybody and she is going to move on with her life. For her now life means her daughters. Her whole concern is her daughters. Throughout the novel, even at the end, she is very much worried, because she has to pay fee for charu. She doesn't expect anything from her husband, which is unusual. She doesn't show any anger or bitterness. She shows her bitterness only once in the novel. To her cousin, Devaki, she says "you want me to cry, what do you want me to say ? you want me to tell the whole world, that my husband

left me, I don't want to say, I don't want to reveal my hurt to the world". There are people who are proud, who don't want to say that ... it is more of a question of a kind of woman she is, rather a kind of flat, fixed definition as a liberated woman. I don't see her, thus. I see her as a very interesting person. I think she is the most interesting character created. Both Sumi and Aru are two people for whom I became very fond of.

- *Your women assert their identity or sexuality through a male friend like Naren for Indu, Kamat for Jaya, Boozie for Saru and Bhaskar for Urmi. But Sumi seems unconscious of that. Is there any special reason for that?*

Certainly Sumi is much older. These friendships are just one part of their lives. For Jaya, Kamat is very important, but for Urmi, Bhaskar is only an acquaintance and then she drops it. It is not very important for her. But for Indu, Naren is important because he is a part of her childhood. So it is not that she is asserting her sexuality through him, that she has sex with him is just an accident, ... it is just that what happens ... in the most vulnerable times he gives her the mental support and comfort. So it is not assertion of her sexuality. Infact Sumi is the person who is very attractive to men even at her age. You see that there is a man who is getting friendly with her. Her daughter gets worried about it and keeps discussing it. For her quality of disattachement is part of her.

One critic said women writers resent the traditional models of Sita or Savitri but fail to suggest any replacement model. Do you have any replacement model ?

Do they think that it is my duty to replace one model with another. I think critics have got very clear idea of what writers should do. It is not my idea of replacing one model with another. I am just de-constructing these myths. Now you take the myth of Sita, as a perfect woman. When I see Seetha, I ask myself, when your husband ditches you, abandons you when you are pregnant, how do you feel ? I am going to be angry and upset ... you know this is what I mean by saying deconstruction and when you take Draupadi for eg. you know she goes after her husbands, 'pativrata' etc. Then I ask myself, what do you do? What choice did you have ? You have to go with your husbands. This is what you are married for and you go with your husband. But you are a very angry woman because your husbands have wronged you and she was a angry woman. So I am in the sense, deconstructing the myth. I am not saying don't take these women as role-models. See them for what they are otherwise the pressure on you is going to be very difficult, if you are expected to be a Sita, a 'Pathivrata' in the sense of Sita, who never wrongs her husband, never does anything wrong -gentle, loving, motherly. You can never be like that and you will always feel guilty, I am not like Sita, I can't be. I am just telling you that let us see Sita as a human being. So I am not telling you to reject that, nor am I offering you a new-role model. All that I am telling you is that, times are different. All these myths were created by

men, and not by women. So we are in the process of discovery now and we are not just going to move aside some models and bring in new models. We are in the process of discovering ourselves. How are we going to live in this new world today ? How do we see ourselves ? What is my role ? How do I operate as a woman ? How do I function as a wife, mother, daughter etc ? It is to do with human ties. How am I functioning as a human being in this world ? I've to function as a humanbeing also outside the home formely I was functioning only within the home. So all these things are a part of me in the process of discovering ourselves. If I'm a wife, I am told to do certain things as a wife. I find it very hard now, now it is not possible. So how am I going to deal with this ? Am I going to completely give up the old thing ? Am I to keep some of the old things ? Is my husband also going to change with me ? So the process of changing is going on both with men and women. All of us are trying to adapt ourselves, to the society as it is and in that process we are discovering ourselves, new ways of living and new ways of functioning. I don't really subscribe to this theory that one is destroying the role-models totally. These role models were imposed on us by men. It was they who wrote the stories. They who told us, about these pativratas, "they told us what we should be". So we want to find out for ourselves, now what we are and how we are going to function in our relationships in our different ties with the whole world. It is too simplistic idea that women writers are destroying the role models and what are the role-models ? ~~This~~ is a liberated woman and this is not a ~~liberated~~ woman. I think literature has to be approached differently. Literature is as complex as life itself